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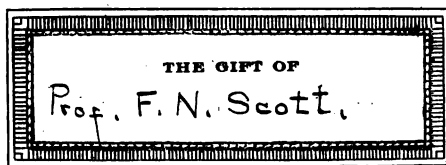
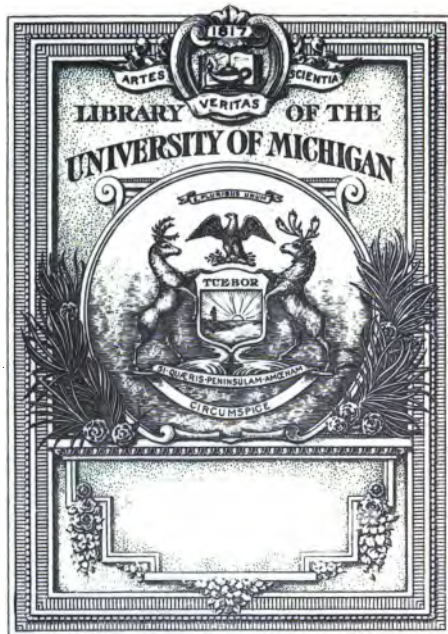
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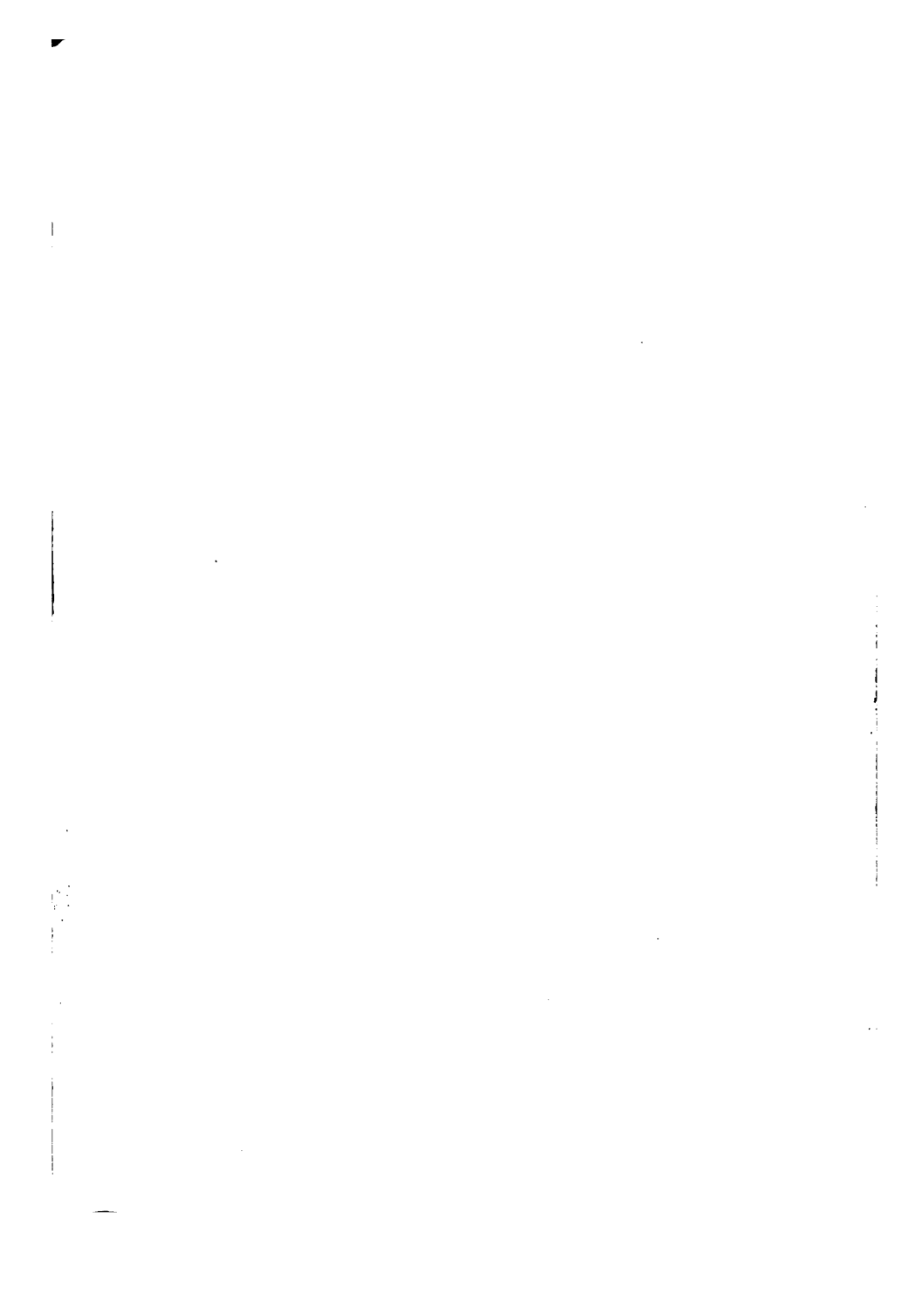
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THE NEW AMERICANS

•The X M Co. •

THE NEW AMERICANS

BY

ALFRED HODDER



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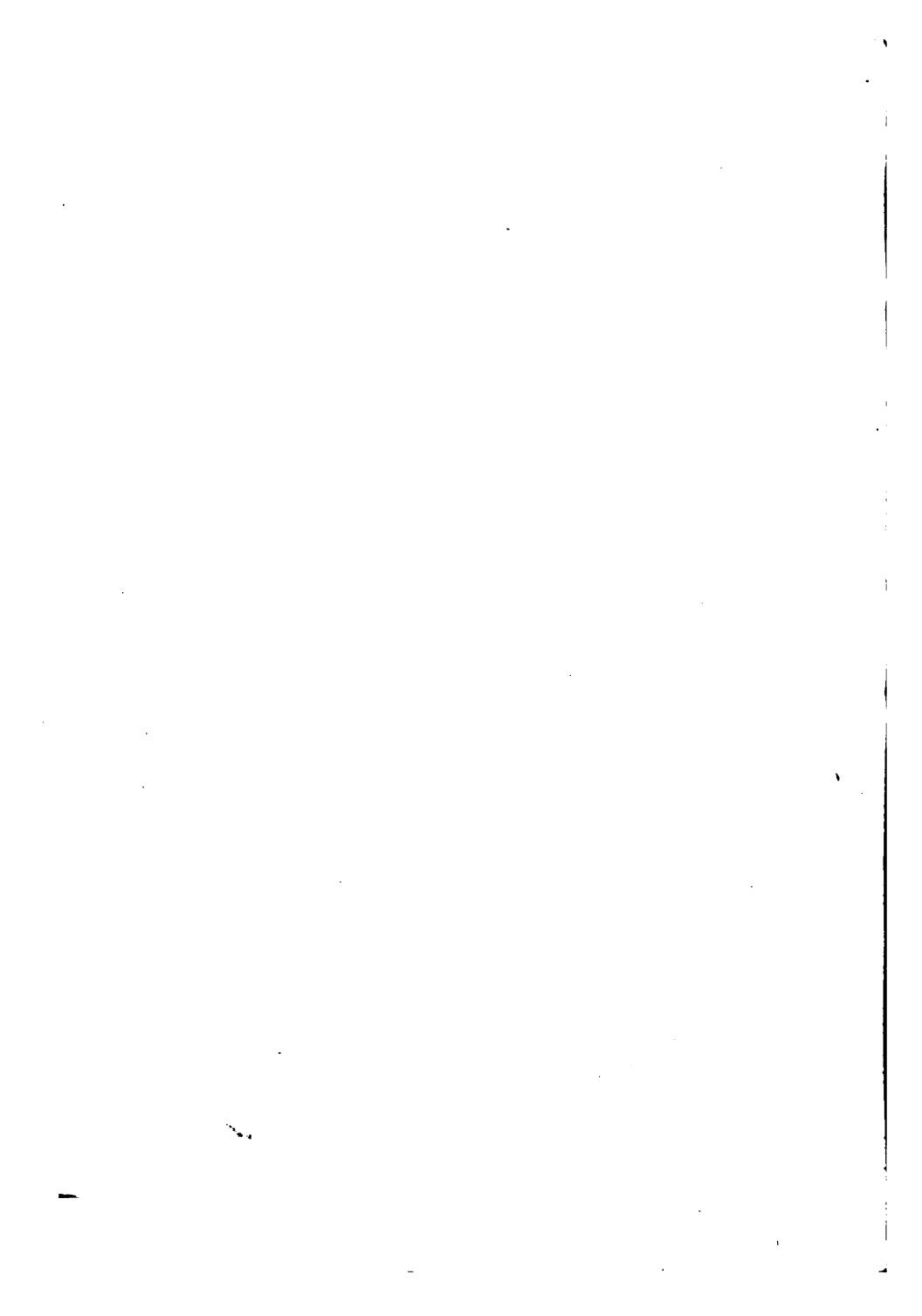


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THE NEW AMERICANS

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THE NEW AMERICANS

BOOK FIRST

I

ALAN WINDET's father, at the age of fifty-eight, was grave, of a finely tempered pride and dignity, with tastes as clear-cut as his features. He had always possessed the advantage for peace in this world of seeing but one side of anything. That side he saw with brilliant lucidity; beyond it, he neither saw, nor suspected the existence of, another. He had simplified his world by the omission of gradations and shades, and made himself a rule of life, which he imposed on others with as little hesitation as he would have felt had it been a theorem of mathematics. He lived in a plenary inspiration of certitudes, and had a ready scorn for any one who did not. To people who differed from him he was commonly superior in fortune, or station, or sheer personal ascendancy, and he could therefore the more readily regard their opinions with disdain; when he could not, he regarded them as singular examples of wanton subtlety; it needed wanton subtlety to go astray. The art of crooked thinking and of crooked living was infinitely intricate: the art of straight thinking and of straight living was simplicity itself. The one thing worth a

man's while was to conduct himself in his actual circumstances, whatever they might be, with distinction and dignity: no one ever failed to do so through mere ignorance: ignorance was impossible. Happily his conception of what distinction and dignity included for a man like himself took in a great deal; nearly everything, in fact, except tolerance and a sense of humour. He had been gifted with a robust frame which he had been at pains to break to manly accomplishments: he could ride and shoot, fence, box, wrestle, and swim with proficiency; he openly despised any man not a consumptive who could not; and the consumptive he despised, instinctively, in secret. He had inherited a strong, dull intelligence in which he never found anything which he had not first put there; but from his childhood good masters had been offered him; he had spent a certain number of hours every day in adding to the stock of notions they had given him, and it was not his habit to forget what he had once learned. Neither was it his habit to unlearn anything: what had once obtained lodgment in his head formed an insuperable obstacle to the passage of everything not consistent with it; and the considerable library he had collected at Estcourt served mainly to dress out his preconceptions in the foppery of scholarship.

He had been a young buck in his day, looking at himself seriously in the glass. He said it was a public charity for a man to make the most of his points, and would discuss as gravely the set of a coat, and whether or not it brought out the breadth of the shoulders and

bulk of the chest, as he would the hocks and muzzle of a saddle-horse or the sights and balance of a fowling-piece. At all times he threw out his chest and made the most of his figure, and when he moved he did so in the strut of the period, which in any one not an impostor presupposed a certain social standing and an income to support it. He carried himself with an open-handed recklessness which was an advertisement to all whom it might concern that he never broke a promise to a man nor wronged a woman. For the rest his notions were conservative, and his scholarship was at the outset rudimentary, as became a young buck. There is a story that somewhere in the hilarious middle of a drinking-bout he laid a hundred to fifty that Charles Elderlin could not repeat the Lord's Prayer. "Done," said Elderlin; and began in his big voice: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; and if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take; God bless papa and mamma and make me a good boy, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Forever and ever, amen!" "Gad," said Cecil, "I didn't think you knew it; you have been well brought up. Double the money you cannot say it backward without a hitch."

He was a stranger in that part of the country; though the property had belonged to the Windets of Melton on the James, even while it was still a strip of the Northwest Territory. The later generations took great credit to themselves because the generations before them had not parted with the land at a time when it had no mar-

ket value whatever. They took still more credit to themselves after the Civil War when the Virginian estates belonging to the family were practically valueless. They said that in matters of business the Windets had a long head, or at least had luck. Cecil possessed the business qualities of his race. When the city grew in a direction which was to his advantage, he regarded that fact as due to some exceptional sagacity of his own; probably because, no matter what the escapade of the evening before, he presented a grave face the next morning to his man of business, and listened judiciously to his advice, and took it. When the city grew in a direction which was not to his advantage, he spoke of that fact with a surprised perplexity, and attributed it to a natural perverseness in things over which not even he could attain a complete control. This procedure is warranted in the end to convince both one's self and one's neighbours that one is an excellent man of affairs, and Cecil had the happy consciousness and the reputation of being a pattern at once of scrupulosity and shrewdness—a trifle conservative perhaps, but quite phenomenally knowing.

Charles Elderlin was in his youth a man whom none of his kinsmen, unless they were very young, could look upon without disapproval, or without pride. Men laughed when they spoke of him, and pronounced him a "flyer," and prudent matrons laughed too even in the presence of their daughters, whom nevertheless they warned to be on their guard. Those were days in which a passion for high play and even for gallantry

was regarded as an ornament, almost as a heightened bloom of manly beauty and high spirits; and it was appropriately at a card-table that Cecil had made Elderlin's acquaintance. They were in the smoking-room of a top-heavy river-steamer, which looked an eighth of a mile long inside because the low decks and staterooms were painted white and the carpet was scarlet and black. Elderlin had been losing quietly for an hour to a sad-eyed dejected little gentleman who caressed a blond whisker with a white hand, and said that he straddled the blind, and would take four cards, in a tone of reflective melancholy. Half a dozen of Elderlin's friends sat about him talking pedigrees and past performances, and pausing from time to time to refer to the most celebrated event in the history of North and of South Carolina, and to ask Elderlin incidentally, *à propos* of his losses, which he would rather do or go a-fishing? — a witticism which was the contemporary version of our latter-day — "How would you like to be the ice-man?" and did not need to be understood to be appreciated. Cecil leaned against a bulkhead and watched the game at an angle from which he overlooked neither hand, which is etiquette. At a point in the game when it fell to Elderlin's lot to deal, Cecil stepped toward him with an apology.

"I beg your pardon, I should like your permission to make a bet with your opponent. I should like to bet him that there are not fifty-two cards in the pack you are about to deal from." Cecil laid a bank-note on the table and bowed to the sad-eyed dejected little gentleman.

The sad-eyed dejected little gentleman caressed a blond whisker with a white hand and lifted to Cecil a look of the most innocent eloquent inquiry. Men everywhere in the room, including Elderlin's friends, got up deliberately out of their seats and stood to watch developments, being suddenly suspicious of every one except themselves, and particularly suspicious of Cecil. Elderlin looked as much like a little boy at a show as his big loose-jointed shoulders and his thick military mustache made possible.

"I should like to bet him also that the cards missing from the pack are in the pocket where he keeps his handkerchief." Cecil laid a second bank-note beside the first. "Don't move, please, before the cards are counted," added Cecil; "you might explode and hurt some one. Every one else stand back from the table, please; it would be unpleasant to mistake any man for this gentleman's accomplice."

Every one else did stand back from the table, each for reasons to him sufficient. There is a courtesy to be observed in such circumstances: there is a time for standing back from the table, and a time for lying flat on the floor, and a time for epic narrative afterward. The sad-eyed little gentleman still caressed his whisker. His look of innocent inquiry had given place to a regretful smile. Elderlin looked at him with unconcealed amusement.

"Do you take the bets?" he asked.

"Not at all," said the little gentleman, sweetly.

Elderlin laughed outright, and the laugh was echoed in the corners of the smoking-room.

"What are you going to do about it?" asked Elderlin, turning to Cecil.

"I lose the chance of doubling my money," said Cecil, smilingly. He caught up his notes and thrust them into his waistcoat, stepping back to his position against the bulkhead.

"The incident, as the diplomatists say, is closed; we go on with our game," said Elderlin, with huge relish, beginning to deal; "I will cover your pile on this hand."

The position of the little gentleman was difficult. He bore himself to admiration. He had not taken his eyes off Cecil from the first minute of his coming forward, and with the same fixed look and the same dim regretful smile he swept his winnings into the middle of the board.

"Dead game, by —, game as they make 'em," laughed one of Elderlin's party.

"The incident closes pleasantly," said Cecil.

"I don't remember that I cut, but that's a detail," said the little man, still sweetly; "give me four cards."

Elderlin took five.

"A pair of deuces," said the little man, laying down his cards.

"A pair of treys," said Elderlin, showing them.

Elderlin pushed the pack across the table.

"On the next hand," he said, "I stake the pile against half your hair and half your whiskers to be delivered in the present company."

This proposition was received with a roar of merriment. If the company there present had had a great office of

the States to bestow by election, Elderlin might have won it in a walk. Perhaps the second office in their gift would have gone to Cecil, leaning negligently against the bulkhead and making the most of his figure; though Elderlin's opponent, shuffling the cards with a finished deftness, was not without his partisans.

"Cut," said the little man.

"That," said Elderlin, touching the pack, "is a detail."

Elderlin took three cards. The rest of the company maintained their places, and whispered comments. The little man took five. Every one had watched him deal.

"Kings and fours," said Elderlin, laying down his hand.

The little man said nothing. He laid down three nines, and amid a second roar of merriment, led by Elderlin, began to pocket his winnings.

"A close shave," shouted Elderlin, his strong bass rising above the din.

"The incident is closed," said Cecil.

"I bid you good evening, gentlemen," said the little man, rising and bowing, still regretfully.

"Just a minute," said Elderlin; "between gentlemen, don't be bashful: what *have* you got in your pocket with the handkerchief?"

The little man hesitated the briefest instant.

"You're a thoroughbred, you are, and the best in town," he said, with a little burst of enthusiasm; "you're a pickled in the corn-juice A 1 sport, and do me proud."

He laid on the table four queens.

II

THE friendship between Cecil and Elderlin thus madly begun had quite as mad an ending.

Mrs. Elderlin was a woman whom her admirers called a "slashing beauty," and whom her friends did not call an angel. The safest thing to say of her is that she lent a meaning and a certain lustre to the current maxims about the sort of women men lose their heads about. She was of a medium height, a poetic mean between too little and too big, and her hair was spun gold. Of the brain beneath it, the less said the better, but her eyes were tenderly, beseechingly, eloquently blue. She was innocent and playful and dimpled; she was gentle and impetuous and imperious; she was capricious, cajoling, angry; she was proud, clinging, suspicious, trustful, and tearful, by turns and all at once. She was as solemn about her toilet as if it were a sacred function; as passionately unreasonable about the turn of a phrase, about whether she should ride her white horse or her brown, about whether Elderlin should go a-shooting or a-fishing, or should wear a white or a black tie at dinner, as if the matter were a point in speculative divinity. She would sit for an hour with her hat on and her gloves in her lap, waiting for Elderlin to adopt some suggestion she had made at the last minute about the buttons he

should wear in his shirt-bosom ; and she would run foot-races with him on the lawn, lifting her skirts and showing her pretty boots, and losing or winning in a burst of ringing laughter.

Elderlin had seen her first at a banquet in Maysville given to Henry Clay, at which she figured among the decorations and *hors-d'œuvres*. There was a sonorous address by the Black Prince, of which Elderlin remembered nothing except that when other people applauded, she applauded too, looking to the right and to the left to make sure that she applauded at the proper time, dimpling with loyalty and enthusiasm. He danced with her four times afterward, and proposed to her six times in rapid succession, receiving each of her five refusals with a roar of laughter, which she told him was not polite. When he married her, he assured her she was more fun than a cage of monkeys, and she pouted over the compliment for a week, whenever she happened to remember it ; and the more she pouted, the greater fun he found her. He thought her the most charming little woman that ever lived, and believed each of her moods and tempers to be more adorable than the last, and exasperated her deliberately to see what she would do next. Of course he would have discharged, and possibly flogged, any servant about the place whom he had found diverting himself after the same fashion with a horse or a dog, partly because he would have pitied the animal, and partly because he would have thought himself a fool, no less, to spoil its temper. A woman, to be sure, is not a horse, nor even an animal ; Mrs. Elderlin at least was

not; she was a comic divinity, all girlish bloom and fun, and, for the most part, her temper was not spoiled, though there were rare occasions when she raged with a protest in every dimple and with baby tears in her baby eyes; and at such times Elderlin caught her in his big arms, and gave her a great bear hug, and a great bear kiss, laughing in the meantime.

Cecil was a frequent witness of these matrimonial pleasantries. The greater portion of his property lay above Cincinnati, opposite the Elderlins' estate; from the house he built, and named Estcourt in the pompous fashion of the day, the white columns and Doric front of the Elderlins' house at Soames were visible across the river on the Kentucky side. For several years both Cecil and Elderlin felt that the day had drawn a blank, if they had not sat side by side in the saddle, or touched glasses and discussed rents and drains, encysted tumours, farcy, and the glanders, and other grave matters known to the administrators of lands, dogs, and horses. Mrs. Elderlin did not seem to Cecil a comic divinity; he thought her an inspired doll — an extremely pretty specimen of the highest of the lower animals; and was of opinion that she should be handled with the temper, discretion, and kindness which are indispensable in the training of any valuable beast. For his own part he made much of her, as he would have made much of a blooded filly during the period of "longeing," while he was breaking it to the snaffle and the saddle. He treated her, in short, with distinguished courtesy. He ventured once after a delicate reconnoissance of

proems and apologies to remonstrate with Elderlin. Elderlin's big dark face became portentously sober for an instant, and even sinister. Then he looked amused, and whistled a couple of bars of "Oh, Mr. Coon, you're a little while soon, the gals won't be ready till to-morrow afternoon." Then he said, "Nice weather we're having, hot but chilly — sort of something with red pepper in it, *frappé*."

One morning in middle springtime Mrs. Elderlin leaned against a revolving bookcase in the big tidy room at Soames which was part chemical laboratory, part gunshop, and part office. There were well-thumbed books on the shelves, which dealt with in-breeding and cross-breeding, subsoils and manures, and kindred subjects so dull that it was an exasperation to know that books were written about them at all. Elderlin was in riding-breeches and shirt-sleeves, a magnifying glass in one eye, and his hands busy with a pair of delicate scissors and a sick vegetable.

"Charlie, you are paltry to be so interested," she said, yawning with ennui; "if you could ever stop dancing a jig long enough to think how you are spending the day, you would find that you are bored to death. You are very, very unhappy, Charlie, and I am very, very sorry for you. What *are* you messing with those nasty weeds for? I'm sure they're smelly." She came forward and picked up a microscope. "What's this?"

"Don't monkey with my things, Kittie; go away, little girl, go away and get a lump of sugar, go away and play with your doll. I'm busy."

"I daresay. You are always busy when I want to talk to you. Charlie, I *won't* be treated like a baby; you've no right to be busy when I want to talk to you. I hate you when you act like that. I was in here five minutes and you never spoke to me. If you don't turn round and take that horrid black thing out of your eye, I will drop this microscope."

This she said with infantine rage and with a stamp of her dainty foot. Elderlin paused in his work and turned his face toward her, presenting a broad grin and a magnified eye.

"Keep it up, Kittens; you look devilish handsome when you are angry. Do it some more, I like it. Only don't drop that microscope; it's the best one I've got. What do you want to talk to me about?"

"What are you doing with those weeds?"

"Those, madam, are not weeds: they are spring bonnets and pretty gowns and a trip to the White Sulphur, and I'm looking for a bug that eats them, and a precious short trip you'll have if I don't find what sort of a bug it is."

"Is that why you wouldn't go driving with me this morning, — because you wanted to look at a *bug*?" She was astonished out of her anger by the excess of her disgust and scorn.

Elderlin took a long look at her pretty face: it had never been meant to express a bigger passion than delight in a bonbon or a well-turned compliment; he laughed till the glass hopped out of his face and rolled on the floor.

"Be serious, Charlie; *I'm* serious," she said, with a second stamp of her dainty foot.

The notion of her being serious, Elderlin found even more richly burlesque than her intonations and grimaces. When she saw that he laughed still louder, she was inspired to prove her seriousness by dashing the microscope after the eyeglass, and sailing out of the room.

Later in the day Cecil dropped in just at the close of luncheon. Cecil was ordinarily as circumspect as the Burial Service, and would have been supposed by his intimates as little likely to refer to Daphnis and Chloe, or to any sort of billing and cooing. He chose the present occasion to illustrate his rule by an exception.

"Good morning to the happy family," he said; "thanks, I've had my lunch."

"The happy family is at its best," said Elderlin, rising and shaking hands. "I am happy because Kittie pouts, and Kittie is happy because she knows she looks her prettiest when she pouts. If she didn't know that, she would not pout. You'll have to excuse me, old man, for half an hour; surveyors, you know: they are waiting. Talk to Kittie till I come back: say something that will make her pout the more; she will be all the prettier."

"I wouldn't for the world say anything that could make her pout, and not even she could look any prettier," said Cecil.

"Bye-bye, rosebud; don't droop in my absence," Elderlin said; and paused in the doorway to sing:—

"Thou hast wounded the spirit that loves thee,
And cherished thine image for years;
Thou hast taught me at last to forget thee,
[*Fortissimo*] In secret, in silence, and tears!"

Mrs. Elderlin did look like a rosebud — like a rosebud trying to simulate granite.

"You had better follow him," she said; "you prefer his company to mine, and he prefers yours."

"But I don't prefer his," said Cecil, gayly, seating himself in Elderlin's place at table; "you are the most charming couple in the world, with your eternal fun; I never know where I shall find you, except that I find always that Elderlin thinks the world, and heaven besides, of you, and that you think the world of him. What's the latest joke?"

"I'm *not* joking," said Mrs. Elderlin, with pygmy passion; "if he thinks the world of me, why isn't he nice to me? Why doesn't he tell me the things he is busy about? He is nice to *you*. He tells *you*. I'm sorry I ever married him. He hates me; at least I hate him; and I hate *you*." The blue eyes actually emitted a kind of flower-like flame.

Cecil was religiously thankful that he had at least not married a fool; but he was sorry for her and sorrier for Elderlin. She would have given everything, at the moment, to be impressive, but she was only pathetic.

"I don't know what you mean," he said gravely; "he can't mention your name when we are alone — and he mentions it often enough! — without his pride in you, and happiness, shining through him. He thinks you the greatest thing that ever happened, and himself the luckiest man. He has the impertinence to throw out his chest and ask me to envy him, even."

"That is very nice — you are a dear to tell me," she said, responding to his altered manner; "and of course

you do not envy him at all ; you are too loyal. And Mrs. Windet is a thousand times sweeter than I. But he treats me like a baby. Oh, Cecil, *ple-ease*, — I am *not* a baby ; I am a woman and his wife. Speak to him for me ; he will listen to you ; he will only laugh at me."

"He will listen to you a thousand times more quickly than to me," said Cecil ; "I beg your pardon ; it troubles me more than I can tell to see you in distress, but it is you as much as he that are to blame. He would listen to you at once if you talked to him as you talk to me."

She answered him by a stare and a sudden spasm of mirth ; and ended holding her sides. Her voice had been breaking with sobs a minute before.

"You look such fun when you talk like that — making your upper lip long and bringing your eyebrows together," — she made her own dainty upper lip long, and brought her dainty eyebrows together. "You goose, I can't talk to him as I talk to you. I *am* serious ; you *will* speak to him for me, — will you not ? — *ple-e-ease* ?"

She threw into her "please" the flexible intonations of a thousand years of cajoling ancestresses, who had laughed and wept and caressed, as occasion served, till they had won their will.

"You are a little witch," said Cecil.

"But you *will* do what I ask : I *want* it," said Kittie.

"Naturally you have always had what you want and always will."

"I have never had *anything* I want ; but I shall have this. I shall begin with this. Please say you will."

"Kittie, I am really sorry to disappoint you : I will."

She clapped her hands.

"All the same," said Cecil, "I shall be a fool."

"Oh, all nice men are fools — beautiful fools; it's that that makes them nice."

Later in the afternoon Cecil and Elderlin strolled together to inspect the ground for a new road about which Elderlin wanted Cecil's advice; that is to say, rather, about which he had had a dispute with his surveyors and wanted Cecil to back up his ideas. When Cecil had something disagreeable to say, it was not his practice to wait for an opportunity; one time being as bad as another for listening to things that are disagreeable.

"Elderlin, I want to tell you something that you will not like," he began.

"That's all right, Cecil old man; just keep on wanting to tell me as long as you find it does you good. I don't in the least mind your wanting to tell me something I shall not like; what I mind is your telling it."

"It's about Kittie; she can't tell you herself, she cares for you too much. You tease her with your fun, you make her unhappy. I think —"

"Drop it, Cecil; nobody asked you what you think." Elderlin had turned suddenly serious and stopped short in his steps and stood facing him.

"You can't behave like the Grand Turk with the key of the hareem door in his pocket," said Cecil, coolly. "Damn it, man, you don't suppose I'm doing it for fun."

"You are not doing it at all; you are going to drop it," said Elderlin.

"You treat her like a doll and a plaything, and she feels it, as anybody would," Cecil continued unmoved; Cecil always was a great advocate of plain speaking: he called it candour. "I needn't say that I know how much you love her; but no one, not even a child, much less a woman, can be happy without politeness."

The delicate tribute to his tenderness and the profound psychological remark brought to Elderlin's face a look of huge disgust, and his impulse was homicidal; but he endured.

"I think it safe to suppose that each man knows his own business best, and would do well to mind it," he said bitterly; "I have seen some of your politeness in your own home, and I can't say I thought of adopting it in mine."

"You treat her," said Cecil, continuing as if Elderlin had not spoken, "with less consideration than you would any other creature in the world."

This Cecil felt to be the truth, and he saw no reason why the truth should not be told. He was rather proud of the precision with which he had worded it. Elderlin did not swear; he lurched swiftly forward and struck Cecil to the ground. He was rather proud of the precision of his blow. Cecil was of the men who grow pale when they are angry. He picked himself up and stood for an instant very quiet and very white.

"My compliments on your hitting," he said sweetly. He could hit rather well himself. "I am waiting for you to apologize."

III

ELDERLIN did not apologize: he consigned Cecil incontinently to a place reserved for the punishment of the wicked after death, and said hotly that he had no excuses to offer; and there was actually a meeting arranged between the two friends, which is ridiculous in a country in which the law permits a man to kill in the defence of his property, but not of his wife's honour or his own. When they had time to think over the matter calmly, they thought over it with growing passion; each regarded the bearing of the other as so outrageous that when Elderlin lay on the ground with a bullet through his shoulder, neither Cecil nor he could be brought to a show of reconciliation.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," Cecil said, stiffly, to the peacemakers; "I have not heard one of you say a word about an apology. He struck me an utterly unprovoked blow, and I have shot him: I see no ground in that for a reconciliation. We are simply quits."

Elderlin was testy.

"He may go plump to Hades and pull the hole in after him," he said; "how much am I hurt?" The bone at the socket of the right shoulder was shattered; he was very badly hurt. "My compliments to him on his shooting; I owe him a return of courtesies; tell him so," said Elderlin.

According to the treatment of gunshot wounds at that time in vogue, the arm had ultimately to be amputated, and the two men never forgave each other.

Cecil was the harder hit of the two so far as the breach of friendship was concerned. Elderlin made friends readily and kept them, and Cecil for the most part did neither. And besides, Cecil's shot accomplished results that were beyond his eloquence: Elderlin held Kittie closer with his one arm than he had found at all possible when he possessed two, and a year later, when she died in childbirth, he was bowed down, and indeed broken, under a weight of grief that took all who knew him best by surprise; while Cecil, even before the date of the duel, had come to feel that his marriage had been not a sacrament, but some devil's travesty of a sacrament, and that but for Elderlin he was alone in the world, alone most of all in his own house.

There are grave ancestors still alive in Virginia who remember Bettie Preston in her teens and young Cecil Windet's mad infatuation with her when he first returned from abroad. He had had a beatific vision of all the virtues in harmony, and had at sight of her endowed her with them, and loved her for the good he thought of her. His gift once complete, her every word and gesture were a revelation of perfection; his juniors wondered how he could be such an ass, and his seniors beamed upon him with good will and dreamed belated day-dreams of Bettie Prestons of an earlier time. What had happened since was simply that little by little she had made the notion he had formed of her, and him along with his notion,

ridiculous. If women might but know the wonder and gentleness with which a man's passion clothes them!—though, no doubt, it would be as tedious to live up to the part of a divinity as to be—*di meliora!*—a born princess. Bettie Preston herself, to do her justice, made no pretension to impossible excellence; she had no great ambition to be better than her neighbours; she was satisfied to be no worse; she was radiantly happy to be more fortunate. There was not an atom of “nonsense” about her; she guided her dainty steps by a lucid, frank, discriminating intelligence. She was not surprised to be found good to look at; she had found herself good to look at in her own glass: she was not surprised to find men flock about her in every ball-room; she had measured the power of the women who were her rivals at the game they were all playing, and knew that she outclassed them. She had examined her suitors with all her wits at her command; she intended to be a perfect wife, and, if might be, a perfect mother; there was nothing else for a woman worth while; and she had a right to look for a perfect husband. Cecil's birth and fortune were all that could be expected, all really that she wished; his high spirit, his manliness, his self-respect, his gallant bearing and fresh undissipated comeliness, had made her prefer him before any man, certainly any man under fifty, that she had ever seen; and his self-dedication to her service was the fine flower of the very quality that the women she knew professed to prize most of all things in the world. She would never have dreamed of expecting him to kneel to her; she thought him a thou-

sand times better fellow than herself; and when of his own motion he took the attitude of worship, she felt a great outrush of tenderness for him that was half humility, half almost gratitude. But when he rose to his feet again she was disappointed, and even hurt: if he did not intend to continue worshipping her, he had no right to begin; she knew perfectly she herself had not changed! The bitter truth to him was that to make him rise to his feet she had had no need to change; she had needed only to show herself as she was; he had never loved her as she was, he had loved her only as she was not. When she revealed herself finally, retreat was for both of them too late; his disaster — and hers! — was as little to be checked as to be measured: he could not even give her his respect.

Yes — his disillusionment amounted in the end to that: no doubt because it had been his pride to judge her by the best he knew, and he had not even yet learned to think of her more meanly. *Noblesse oblige* — it is not without grave peril that any woman consents to be crowned queen. To let one's self be thought better than one is, is to live beyond one's income, and to mortgage the felicity of later times. He had expected her in a thousand things to hold him straight, to be an embodied counsel of perfection. She had undertaken that function readily enough; all women undertake it with a readiness that is amazing, if one considers the sheer ignorance in which they contrive to live. They seem to assume that freedom from error, in especial in the gravest, most intricate affairs of life, is a quality of sex like an ab-

sence of beard, and that the innocence which is mere native kindness in the absence of temptation to do harm, is a perfect substitute for the full knowledge and deliberate "benevolence" of a finished man of the world. She had entered with the quick, light sympathy of the days of courtship into his feeling that the conduct of his fortune was a public trust; the inconveniences of that idea were not then borne by her; she did not even guess the nature of them; and borne by him they were a reason the more for thinking of him with a delicious little flutter of enthusiasm. Once safely married, she had discovered that whoever takes ideas so seriously as to deviate from the practice of his "set" takes them with a seriousness that may become hateful. She had tried first remonstrance, then irony; and at last, in a number of instances in which the opportunity occurred to her, had boldly and coolly disregarded his wishes and forced his hand. Her words he had met with a silent disappointment; her active interference he had sternly and suddenly repressed. If she could not lead, she must at least obey; if she could not be a woman, she must submit to be ruled as a child; a man has his work to do, and the woman who will not help — who clings about him and impedes him — must be shaken off. He gave her no explanation at the time; he was too deeply wounded; his explanation would have been too bitter; and later the time for explanation was past. The time for explanation had never been; there was no time at which she would have understood; she would have argued her case in inspired platitudes; she would have

said in a variety of phrases, "In God's name be like other people: the world was not made for the whim of any one; if you are different from other people, you will be worse — by the mere fact that they are not like you!" Like other people! — her highest ideal was an *édition de luxe* — a sumptuous copy — of the average man, of the "beautiful mean."

This at least was Cecil's version of his married life, then and for years afterward. Mrs. Windet's version was somewhat different.

IV

A GREAT stillness settled like an exhalation of quiet upon the house and trees at Estcourt and filled the sheltered hollows in the grounds; and the lawns and shrubberies, scrupulously kept, wore an aspect of almost cloistral privacy and reserve. The walks maintained their definite outlines in an all but self-conscious seemliness; the oaks and beeches seemed to meditate their dignity; the very atmosphere possessed the bouquet of a private stock.

Mrs. Cecil Windet strolled long hours in the woods, or loitered by the riverside, and watched in time of flood the coal-fleets sweep past and down; in time of pestilence the fever-smitten steamers labour up and up in search of a permitted landing they would not find; and at all times the amber lights and shadows shift and change, and the turbid waters drift and ripple on and on — she cared not whither.

One day at Estcourt was so much like another that the calendar was an impertinence, except that it marked a mutation in the weather and the light. The great hall-clock, that paused on each second and parted with it reluctantly, struck the hour with scarcely more regularity than did the Windet household. There was always the same decorous meeting at the time of prayer

and meals, the same decorous make-believe of conversation when the servants were by, the same dumb-show of courtesy whether they were by or not, the same pretence at all times possible of separate occupation, the same tacit avoidance.

It was as if they were under some fantastic enchantment, he and she; he to maintain the mortal routine of etiquette in which they lived, she to fall in with it, both to go on forever together, as a punishment perhaps for having set out together in the first place, when of all people in the world they were the fittest to give each other pain. She was not born to give or receive pain, still less to live under a weight of cold dislike; she was born to please and to be pleased with radiant ease. What could a man be like inside, she asked herself, who so wanted what he wanted, and cared year after year so little out of whom he pressed the life, if only he might seize his object and hold it fast! There were times when she was half afraid of him, with a fear that deprived her of her strength, as she sat and watched him in his steadfast unflinching reticence. There were times when the strength surged back in her and the impulse to revolt became so violent it was a pain.

"If a woman had forty lives to live, it would not be worth while to lead one like this — not even in order to relish the other thirty-nine," she once broke out, *à propos* of nothing that had been said, *à propos* of everything that had not been said. "An administrative gift is a talent for making things charming and life amongst them hateful; it is economical of everything but flesh

and blood: the sin of waste applies, I suppose, only to matters of small value; look after the pennies and leave the pounds to look after themselves. For you at least, I hope it pays; as for myself, I am buried alive, beneath a great smooth cold fantastically 'correct' family monument."

And when for all reply he had wondered silently whether he or the house at Estcourt was the monument, she saw him drop his eyes again upon his book and tranquilly turn a page.

Buried alive of course she was not; she wished at times she were. She would at least have had the immunities of burial; she would at least not have been obliged to play a part. It was impossible that he should care for her; it was absurd to suppose that he had ever cared, really. She had been to him from the first merely one thing the more to be penetrated by his slow benumbing volition — she felt it in her body like a physical damp and cold. She had felt it like a garment of flame not seldom in the earlier time. She had almost left him once, a year or more after the duel, when the sting and sting of his demeanour toward her seemed more than she could bear. She had had the carriage at the door, indeed, and Alan and his nurse safely bestowed in it, and was herself fastening on her hat, when Cecil unexpectedly had caused himself to be announced and asked leave to wait on her. It was a part of his exasperating want of logic, she conceived, that he was prodigal of small attentions and niggardly of great ones; he was always giving her everything she wanted except what

she wanted most; he was always causing himself to be announced and asking leave to wait on her; he would as little have thought of entering her room without permission as of doing anything she wished after his entrance was made. She was a woman of a brave spirit, and when the servant had delivered his message had simply finished fastening her hat.

"Say that I am ready to receive him here."

"You are going away?" he had inquired colourlessly, when they were alone.

He was always inquiring colourlessly after what was obvious, in imitation no doubt of a diplomatic courtesy which can take nothing for granted, though it be as brutally plain as a blow in the face, unless it be officially announced.

"No; I am not going away; I have never been here really—I have never been myself here; I am merely removing certain of my effects," she had replied very quietly. "Or if you have mistaken my effects for myself, then, yes; I am going away; going now, going for always. Estcourt is not a home, it is a model prison; and I have committed no heinous crime that I should be reformed my lifetime through; I have committed only a folly and an indiscretion in mistaking Cecil Windet for a possible husband."

She faced him. Cecil did not relish being mentioned in any connection whatever with folly and indiscretion. He took refuge in a philosophical remark, the effect of which in the circumstances was ironic.

"Marriage is always a prison to two people who don't hit it off together. So is any other undertaking that

turns out ill. All the same, people of honour pay their debts — whether they find paying pleasant or not."

He mentioned these things as coldly as if he were a vocal icicle. Mrs. Windet kept her temper.

"I did not engage to be loved and honoured before the servants, and unbeloved and dishonoured at all other times," she said. "It is you who do not pay your debts. I cannot argue the question against you; you can always make the prettier speech. But I haven't the least intention in the world of waiting to go away till I can turn a phrase and polish a period. I will turn my phrases and polish my periods when I am gone. If you have nothing else to say, perhaps you will be good enough to bid me good morning: I am pressed for time."

In those early days Mrs. Windet would not for the world have said she was "in a hurry"; she, too, cultivated elegance.

"It strikes me you argue against me and turn your phrases rather well," said Cecil, with scrupulous justice. Cecil kept his justice on ice, and served it cold. "You have no right to go and to break up my home; but I will place no obstacle in your way—if you go alone."

This was generosity. Cecil kept his generosity on ice with his justice. It must not be forgotten that he possessed a large measure of both.

"I do not go alone."

"Alan's place," he dropped, "is in his father's house. The place of Alan's mother is also there. If she leaves it, she cannot come back."

A great flood of colour came and went in her face as

he spoke, and began to pour into her cheeks again before she replied. Some pathetic impulse to plead with him all but took possession of her. But she could not plead with him: he was not a man, he was a document; he was a collection of formulas with hands and feet and effective power. If she had but possessed the effective power!

"Do you mean that you will take him out of the carriage by force, and keep him away from me? I might as well know."

"I mean precisely that — by force."

She sat down as if from sheer weakness, looking at him with a fascinated steadiness. It seemed a long while before she gained possession of herself.

"Alan's mother," she said, "is deeply indebted to you; she will not leave her 'place.'" She lifted her arms and began to unfasten her hat.

But she had left her place already, as it happened; and it was wholly true she could not come back to it. When Cecil took his leave, she felt such bitterness of discomfiture that, quite deliberately, as if she knew herself to be ill, she went to bed and waited with closed eyes for the sleep which did not come — which came at last. When the next day she woke, she was alien and strange in her awakening; she was just one minute old. It was as if in some malicious imitation of the ancient torch-race a life and burden that had belonged to some one else had been in midcourse passed on to her; she had awakened in some one else's body, in some one else's bed, in some one else's day, and was discovering and wondering at the walls and tables, the mirrors and

the light. A great shyness came upon her at the thought of dressing, and dogged her while she dressed, and followed her down the wide stairs.

She was an intruder plain and simple: the sense of it deepened in her the instant that she entered the room in which Cecil rose and stood to receive her, and deepened to depths more profound as the morning wore away. She was under no illusion in regard to the terms on which she stayed; she had no lightest wish that he should attempt to ignore the situation between them as really it was; she would certainly have checked the attempt had it been made: he had caught her in a moment when she was defenceless and had taken unsparing advantage of his opportunity; she would accept no favour at his hands that could for an instant be supposed to bind her to forgive or to forget. But favour apart, there were a thousand minor courtesies by which, without pretending to resign his victory, he might have tempered the harshness of it: he might at least have spared her for a time the sight of him and speech with him; in mere gentleness of manners he might have made some colourable pretext for absenting himself from Estcourt a few days. A slow contempt rose in her when the hour to dress for dinner came and he had shown no sign of intending to efface himself, and along with the contempt came a poignant tenderness for the woman in whose place she had awakened, the *other* woman, the woman whose rings were on her fingers, whose clothes were on her back, the woman who had been Cecil Windet's wife. When later in the evening she was dawdling over a book and he came near

her and began to speak, she looked up at him detached and hostile, and saw him in his blond aggressive erectness and vigour with a freshness of vision that had never been possible to her before.

"Naturally," he began, "I expect you to give me your word that you will never repeat your attempt of yesterday."

"And if I refuse?"

"I place about the child a guard night and day."

She sat silent, not thinking of his question, but thinking of him, of herself, of the life that might have been so easily, so easily, she was tempted again to plead with him.

"You give your word," he insisted.

"I took yesterday, I suppose, only my novitiate of dishonour: I give my word."

"Thank you. And now about the house-party in the Christmas holidays"—he continued. "I had thought—"

"I beg your pardon," she interrupted, "if you will announce to me, when you have quite made up your own mind, what you are determined I shall do, no doubt I must do it. But neither now nor at any future time will I take one atom of interest in preliminaries."

There fell a little silence before he bowed, during which they crossed looks as combatants cross swords, and in that moment she won back half his victory.

V

SHE had thought she must in time form herself to that attitude of protest; she had conceived her world becoming a world of surfaces, simply, and Cecil a surface among surfaces untenanted by a soul, and herself moving in a sacred stillness and quietude amongst them, sacrificed no doubt to him and them — dedicated — under protest, but in the end under an accepted protest, in an eternal peace. She had reckoned with an imperfect knowledge of herself; she had reckoned with an imperfect knowledge of him. School herself as she might to acceptance, the protest burned at her heart in a fire she had no tears to quench; and however competently he might serve as a surface, and on the whole even as a gracious one, he was not a surface merely, and no deftness and agility of the defensive fancy could long regard him as such. Her world became to her at best a blank gray prison cell, and she became inside at best as blank and gray as it — as blank and gray and cold — except for the passion of helplessness which came upon her now and again, and the passion of tenderness for Alan.

She had cultivated from the first a shy friendship for him. She had been diffident and awkward with him even when he was a child, in her uncertainty what might or might not be polite to boys: she knew so well how little

any one about herself at least had ever known what is polite to girls ! and even as a child he had felt her diffidence and awkwardness, and had met them with a child's diffidence and awkwardness in return. He felt also, as the days wore on, her helplessness, her inability or unwillingness to give an order, even to a governess or to a footman ; he came tacitly to conceive her, as she conceived herself, as a reluctant mute in some grave year-long masque. This was to be expected ; the paradox was that he did not despise her. On the contrary, he regarded it always as a privilege — no doubt because there were certain formalities to be observed in obtaining it—to visit her in her own rooms, and to see her toilet tables and mirrors, and to see her herself forever dressed as if for an event which did not come off, and forever sitting with a book before her which she had opened to pass the time and forgot to read. He regarded it as a privilege to saunter aimlessly about with her in the open air ; — she was very good to look at ; she was always pleased with him, and glad to see him ; she would listen to him endlessly ; she chaffed him in a way that did not hurt ; she would even play games, if the games did not require her to move rapidly ; and in the end, her very lack of certainty in addressing him served perhaps to bring her closer to him ; it placed her a little on an equality with him ; it almost made an appeal to him to put her at her ease.

There established itself in time between them a tradition of kindness and intimacy with subtle limitations not without their charm. Little enough in the nature of caresses passed between them, and that little was in a

manner blundered into in obedience on either side to an impulse of the moment which served, when it was gone, to increase rather than to diminish their timidities; but they learned to laugh together with a certain frankness at their own discomfiture; and though she had made it a point of self-respect never secretly to defeat Cecil in his somewhat austere rule of life for Alan, the evil of a divided sympathy in the sheltered household was one to which inevitably the boy was subjected, and out of which he made a sentimental profit. Openly, in Alan's younger years, she had never opposed Cecil's will about him but once, and that, until a much later period, had made on Alan himself no impression of note beyond a moment's huge surprise. He was about thirteen when he strayed one morning, with an air perfectly woe-begone, into a little summer-house where she sat, as he entered, unperceived. She knew that at least it could not be polite to boys to notice plainly that they were dejected, not to say making an effort to keep back the tears. She let the book she held slip through her fingers to give Alan some obvious chance to make himself a countenance before he should need to speak.

"Thank you," she said, not looking at him as she took the book; "I am glad you came. I was just thinking of you; I want your help in a very grave case of propriety — of the casuistry of courtesy, sir knight. What is a gentlewoman deeply smitten with a rueful youth to do when she wishes to be helped to help, and doesn't wish to ask for any confidences that are not offered her?"

He looked first puzzled and then embarrassed; he was afraid she was laughing at him. Inevitably the spiritual "in-breeding" at Estcourt had told upon him, and he appeared a very old-young boy, with something of the special wistfulness about the brow and lips that prematurely aged young things show, as if in settled hunger for a youth which they have not known. Otherwise he was a pleasant, spirited lad to look upon, with an honest freckled face, honest steady eyes, and straight brown hair that caught and flung back the light.

"I don't know what you mean," he said uneasily.

She laughed more like a young girl than Cecil had ever heard her laugh, and the boy laughed too from sympathy.

"I think I mean, though it seems I don't know how to say it, that if the rueful youth is really in trouble, I should like to help him."

"Is the rueful youth me?" asked Alan, doubtfully, not sure what the word "rueful" might signify.

"I don't know any other rueful youth I would help so willingly," she said, still laughing; "indeed I don't know any other rueful youth at all, and I want *very* much to help some one."

"You can't help me," he said, his dejection returning upon him.

"It isn't, then, a question of the treasury? I had hoped it was!"

No, it was a question of such transcendent concepts as audacity and stratagem, party rivalry and party loyalty; it was a tale of barricades of soft mown short grass, and of desperate assault and repulse with apples for missiles

and an effective cavalry of four ponies with inexhaustible saddle-bags full of ammunition. To be sure the steeds themselves were apt to become unmanageable, in especial under rapid fire of chestnut-burs; sometimes even unseating their cavaliers, to the huge delight of a hostile infantry. For all his grown-up airs, Alan was still the most boyish of boys: his brigade had failed brilliantly for three succeeding afternoons to carry the enemy's position; to-day had been appointed for the final assault, and the defeat, it seemed to him, would be shorn of all its radiance with him not there. Indeed his absence was unimaginable, horrible, an obvious miscarriage in an orderly world; and, to say the truth, even as he told it with half-humorous self-pity and exaggeration that was in part self-mockery, to his auditor his absence came suddenly to seem very literally unimaginable, revolting; and some quick outleap of feeling passed like a spasm across her face. "Not to-day, nor for some days to come," Cecil Windet had said that morning, when Alan applied to him for leave of absence; "you see too much of boys of your own age; you see too much in particular of Howard Lidcott." Cecil had not meant to be unkind: that was merely his way of being wise. Some barrier in Mrs. Windet that the silent years had seemed minute by minute to build up was brusquely swept away, as if by the impact of a wave that in an instant had formed and flung itself, when Alan quoted Cecil's edict in his frank boyish drawl.

"Of course *I* don't mind," he concluded, with grown-up hilarity; "but I hate to see the fellows licked."

"As of course they would be if you were with them."

"Of course they would. What else do I go for?"

"You don't go, it seems. And if you don't go, you at least escape what you hate; you will not see the 'fellows licked,'" she said grimly. And then: "If you started now should you be too late?"

"It's no use," he said.

"Answer me, dear, please; should you be too late?"

"No; not if I ran."

"Then run!"

"Really?—really!" He could not believe his ears "You dear!" He sprang upon her and gave her a great kiss, and turned and ran.

She sat looking after him, mournfully enough. He was the only young thing in the whole household, and even upon him "discipline" (the marks of quotation stood in her thoughts for scorn) had laid its chilling touch. They were dead on the surface at least, the rest of them: they lived, if they lived at all, inside an inch of shell. Whatever fire of passion they might possess was a dying fire: they were dying from without inward; all but Cecil, who died from within outward—who had died long since, she sometimes fancied, and survived only as a horrible effective machine which ran, as a wheel runs, smoothly, upon an initial impulse given, and given not again. Alan, too, would begin to retreat presently from his frank face and eyes and to take up his abode in the darkened passages within, and for her any living contact with him would become impossible. It was as if the one spark of light under a rayless sky were being

borne away from her as she sat and watched him running; when he quite disappeared behind a clump of trees, it was for the moment as if the night were even then once for always come. She went to the house presently and wrote to Cecil a little note and despatched it to him. She would at least keep Alan alive as long as she might. She would at least do battle for him. Some strong elation took possession of her as she thought of it. There came upon her a sense that she had a chance; that really she should win; not perhaps at the moment, nor even soon, but in the end, in a run which should be a long run. She had deliberately worded what she had to say in a form which demanded no reply; but she expected a reply; and while she waited for it all the afternoon, she nursed with a growing complacency her idea. She had a long time to wait actually; till the evening of the next day when she was on the point of bidding Cecil a good night.

"About the note you sent me yesterday," he began abruptly.

She had lost herself for the moment in the singing whisper of the night that came in through the open window; she had been saying to herself for the last half hour that she would go to a special window of her own and watch the fireflies.

"Yes?" she returned.

"May I ask how often you purpose to defeat intentions of mine in regard to Alan?"

"May I ask how often, if I try, you purpose to let me succeed?"

"Not often at all; not again, I think. I beg your pardon for my explicitness."

"Your explicitness may, no doubt, prevent mistakes. Is it quite in your power, however, to prevent my succeeding, if I try? — I mean, of course, without making Cecil Windet ridiculous?"

"It is quite in my power without making myself ridiculous to remove Alan for the greater portion of the year from Estcourt."

"Alan's place, of course, — I have it on unexceptionable authority, — is in his father's house."

"Estcourt is not my house when my wishes there are not respected."

Some thought of her own wishes flamed swiftly up in her, and the words formed themselves within her as distinctly as if she had spoken them, "I wonder if you know how utterly hateful you can be." She sat, however, merely looking at him, from out of the depths, it seemed, of a great tranquillity, as if she were still half lost in the singing whisper of the night. It was no part of her "idea" that Alan should be immediately removed from her neighbourhood.

"Am I to understand that you distinctly menace me with removing him?"

"Perfectly."

"It is almost a pity you should not be told how detestable you make yourself."

"Of course, I know you cannot like what I am doing."

She was silent.

"Shall I send him away?"

"No."

"You consent then to the conditions on which alone he can stay?"

She hesitated.

"I suppose so," she said at length, reluctantly. "Yes. For the present, certainly."

He seemed on the point of demanding of her what in especial she could mean by "for the present"; but contented himself with the dictum:—

"Of course, I state a personal impression only; but, in my belief at least (if you care at all to be of use to Alan!), you can only hurt your power of serving him by provoking a contest."

She wondered if all men, or at least all "nice" men, spoke of "hurting one's power of serving" and of "provoking a contest." She seemed to remember her father's crying in a fit of exasperation, "Damn it, Milly, don't be unreasonable; the thing's like this—" And then she remembered his apologizing to Milly afterward for his outburst, and saying that he had the most adorable wife *and* the most infamous temper in the world.

"Your personal impression," she said, "is always of value; it is so often right. It is so often in your power to make it right! May I bid you good evening?"

She rose. He was already standing, and opened the door for her.

"I am sorry to have detained you; good night," he said, and bowed her out.

VI

FOR the present, certainly! Her "idea," as in a moment of prophetic fervour it had come to her, did not relate to the present. Cecil Windet was stronger than she; there was nothing in her to bear witness against meeting his force with fraud. It was not fraud; it was *finesse* — legitimate *finesse*. Cecil's express wishes she was careful, sedulously, from that moment forward to "respect"; his unexpressed wishes she took the liberty, sophistically, as to herself she confessed, to disregard. The strong contemptuously coerce; the weak contemptuously deceive: in the mixed lights — at least the blent lights — of the ethics in which we live, why not? "Until you are one-and-twenty walk in the eye of the Lord!" she said to Alan with an impetuosity which out of measure astonished him; and at another time — at a dozen other times, "In God's name until you are one-and-twenty be on the outside as you must; but in God's name, too, be as other people are inside!"

Counsel in that intention and kind apart, she made no effort openly to thwart Cecil's wishes till Alan was about eighteen. Even then she was shy to begin until she was assured by a hovering trouble in his still frank boyish eyes that the moment for which she had sat in wait, the "psychological" moment, was come. He was grown a

tall, clean-limbed youth, with a dark fire and gayety piercing through the look of old-young wistfulness still there; he was grown to seem much more indisputably her son than when he was a boy; and there were between them, perhaps because of the quite exceptional delicacy of their comradeship and the quite exceptional intimacy made by such delicacy possible, a thousand subtle sympathies and refinements of opinion and taste which had come to be to her, as she watched for them, and did not watch in vain, the very passion and pride of life.

"When do you go to college?" she asked, as if wholly by the way, one morning when Alan stood minute after minute moodily watching the gray rain fall in straight dim silver lines, that might well have seemed to him, as to her, symbolic of the prison bars behind which both of them lived.

"Little Windet heirs-apparent do not go to college," he replied without bitterness, telling her what she perfectly surmised and had perfectly counted on; "some of that mystic bloom, which is their birthright, might get rubbed off. It is the war paint of our tribe, and from the age of one to the age of thirty comes off on the fingers, it seems; and better a Windet lost his scalp than his bloom. For the bloomless Windet is reserved a destiny without a name which the heir of Estcourt scarcely dares contemplate.

"He knows not what that 'cuss' may be,
And so he bloometh steadily,
And little other care hath he,
A hot-house plant in pot!

"I adore weather, don't you?" he ended abruptly: "any old weather, even this."

"At least I prefer falling weather to sinking verse." And making a fresh start: "Doesn't the little Windet heir-apparent long quite desperately to go to college; doesn't he quite rage within that go he cannot?"

"Worse than that. The little Windet heir-apparent is fairly ravenous for vulgarity even. He would delight in being the first vulgarian in the family, only some of his noble ancestors have anticipated him. He modestly wishes, at least, to follow their lead, at a distance — at a great distance."

"Does he wish it enough to run a risk — I should not think the risk great — of being partially disinherited?"

He turned away from the window and presented his full face to her. She had spoken with a mildness so superfluously non-committal that he perfectly understood at last she must have something grave to say.

"I think he has been wondering for a long time whether his inheritance is worth what it may cost," he said slowly, with a slight change of colour. "Do you mind telling me what you are talking about?"

She did not in the least mind telling him what she was talking about; she motioned him to a seat beside her and told him in detail and at great length.

Six months later, one early autumn morning in which the air was heavy, it seemed, with gathered stillness and sweetness as with a garnered harvest of the whole still sweet summer, Cecil Windet entered Mrs. Windet's sitting-room. It was a dozen years since he had crossed the

threshold of what was in effect her separate dwelling; and there was an instant when he first came in and they stood facing one another during which she all but abandoned, in a sudden rush of memory, the purpose for which she had summoned him. There was an instant in which, through the face that she had long learned to know as Cecil Windet's, there looked out upon her another face that she had known, and cherished, in an earlier time. There was an instant in which it seemed to plead with her that it too lay imprisoned within that austere clean-cut mask, and must hear, as it would once have heard, in pain too keen to be dissembled, any word of hers not simply the gentlest she might devise. Imprisoned, indeed, that clear, fair, boyish face with its quiet, wistful eyes, which had seemed to her at one time dim with some dear vision, that had almost frightened her, of herself made perfect: imprisoned, as she also was imprisoned, by an alien some one she had never loved, had never known, who had little by little imperceptibly made himself of their company. She scarcely found the words to ask Cecil to sit down.

"You have something of consequence to say to me?" he asked formally.

Something of eternal consequence, if but the face within the face could have remained quite steadily and visibly there; or even if in some inflection or semitone there might have spoken a voice within the voice.

"I have an announcement to make which, I daresay, may displease you."

"Your skill in displeasing me is quite perfect. If you suppose yourself in this case successful, I should say

there can be no doubt you are right. What is the announcement?"

Qui amat periculum, peribit in illo. He was become so accustomed to the arrogance of success he could speak no other tongue. The face within the face was less a living suppliant than the wraith of a suppliant long since dead that by some miracle of fidelity was *revenant*, come back, to counsel, to forewarn.

"For many years," she said, in a manner at last not unlike a reproduction of his own, "I have had slight occasion, almost none, to draw upon my separate income. I find myself rather rich; and have determined to make a settlement on Alan."

"I was not aware that Alan had been stinted of anything that it is best he should have had."

"Possibly we differ in opinion in regard to what it is best he should have had. Certainly we differ in regard to what it is best he should have now."

For the first time Cecil's face betrayed the suspicion that he was decoyed into a *guet-apens*. His mind had travelled a long way before he spoke.

"It had seemed to me self-evident that it is for Alan's good he should be dependent for the present on his father."

"It seems to me self-evident that it is for Alan's good he should be dependent for the present neither on his father nor on me."

"I fancy I had guessed long since what you wish. You wish—is it not so?—that Alan should proceed to college? I shall not consent to it."

"Alan is already entered at Harvard. He leaves for Cambridge to-morrow. No doubt you can prevent him; but not without giving me a chance to put you publicly in the wrong; not, indeed, without giving me a chance to make Cecil Windet perfectly ridiculous."

Once more there fell a little silence during which, as at a time many years before, which she vividly remembered, they crossed looks as combatants cross swords.

"I have nothing to say," he said, and rose from his chair.

"I have—a single word. In Alan's childhood, when I was on the point of leaving Estcourt, you forced me to stay by a menace. I knew perfectly at the time that with your ideas you could not but, with a passionate sensitiveness even, want me to stay; but I dared not take the risk. Alan is so near of age that your menace has lost its virtue; I am quite satisfied, when the time comes for choosing, whom he will choose. If you walk out of the room, as you seem to intend, without another word, I leave Estcourt to-morrow. Not only so; I leave Estcourt to-morrow, unless, before you turn aside, you explicitly ask me to stay."

"You seem to be very sure of your hand."

"I am sure of my hand."

Cecil paused an instant as if he were choosing his words.

"I daresay you are right to be sure of it. With all possible explicitness, I ask you to stay."

VII

A GREAT change took place at Estcourt when Alan returned after an absence of eight years — a change like a quickening of the blood. The clock-work of the household told off the seconds and struck the hour with its customary regularity; Alan had slipped into his place in the machinery like a well-oiled wheel; but the clock told the seconds and struck the hour with a new smartness.

Mrs. Windet examined critically the work of her hands and could lay her finger on no flaw in it, and was oddly dissatisfied. He was brightly tranquil, busy, kind, and blithe, but she missed something in him, she did not know what. She had never asked him to be unreserved, but there was a light of fun in his eyes as if the surface that he presented were a joke; she wanted to be let into the secret of the joke. He chatted gayly, and was abundant in badinage, but avoided the confidential tone as if it were a social misdemeanour; he never "gave himself away," he kept something back. She had prayed that he should make himself "like other people," and her prayer had been answered too completely; the likeness was too close to be genuine, he was like too many other people, he was too like any one and every one she had seen him with. She had prayed that he should come

back a Philistine, and she finished by defining him as one; but as a Philistine with his tongue in his cheek, as a Philistine with something up his sleeve. What was perhaps more exasperating, he seemed hilariously confident that the thing up his sleeve was something worth while.

"The young prince has sat at the feet of outlandish sages and travelled in outlandish places, and has come home an epitome of wisdom; he stands ready to supply any one on demand with a complete set of opinions on all things human and divine; he is a pocket-encyclopedia of what ought to be thought and when — and what ought not to be said! That is to say, he has absented himself for a time from the eyes of his loving subjects while he has committed his follies, unofficially, in private, and learned the difference between soap and pistache. The main use of universities is to afford young princes a place of retirement in which to learn in private the difference between soap and pistache; the published curriculum is but a harmless necessary blind."

Mrs. Windet dropped these sentences one afternoon in the sitting-room in which some years before a stripling had stood before the window watching a driving rain, declaring that he adored weather—"any old weather."

"The young prince's mamma does not seem to lack a bitter knowledge of fact," said Alan. "She has not had to sit at the feet of the sages or to travel in outlandish places or to commit follies. That shows the inborn superiority of women to men; women know congenitally the difference between soap and pistache!"

"When a woman holds her tongue for twenty years, she has no choice but to acquire bitter wisdom, unless she goes mad. Consider the ordinary energy of a woman's tongue, and you will find that statement moderate. Men have something to do to occupy them, and do it; women have nothing to do but to talk or to think, and a woman's thinking is of necessity bitter; perhaps because she has to keep it to herself. Of course you look upon your mother as simply a sour old woman." She did not look in the least sour; she was radiantly smiling. "But the truth is she is disappointed to her toes. She used to have rather good toes!" She pushed out the tips of her boots beyond the hem of her skirt, and contemplated them, satirically. "The things girls have and old women want! I don't know what I want or what I expected. I haven't a fault to find with you—possibly that is the reason. I don't want *you*, as you are; I didn't expect you, as you are. Alan, I love you, and, I'm horribly afraid, I respect you, but I don't *like* you a bit!"

"Women, young or old, with their likings and dislikings, and distinctions and subtleties, as if there were no serious business in life to be done!" Alan laughed with his free laugh that was affectionate and deferential and non-committally courtly, all in one. "I'm sure you have adorable toes; at least, you have the loveliest boot-tips in the world! As for liking and disliking, as the woman in the play says, it is better to begin with a little disliking—heaven may improve it! I will back love and respect any day against disliking in a 'mix-up'; especially in mothers. My experience of mothers is not wide,

I never had more than the usual number, but I'm recklessly confident and generalize from one instance. Mothers were invented to give cynicism the lie and to make and to keep the cynic ashamed of himself. What on earth do you mean that you dislike? Am I not straight in the shoulders and slim in the legs? Am I not pretty-behaved? Am I not a full-blown, self-centred, domineering male with no end of 'cheek' and 'side' such as women most approve of, when they haven't fallen in love with the dancing-master?"

"You are pretty-spoken when you say nice things to your old mother in reply to nasty things she says to you. And her dislikes do not count: she is always steadily on your side. Mothers were invented to keep men-children in conceit with themselves; conceit being necessary to enable men to do things. But I was not thinking of my own likes and dislikes: I was thinking of Cecil's. When you are in Rome you have got to do as Rome does, or take the consequences, and at Estcourt Cecil is Rome. The man that sups with Cecil at Estcourt has got to have a long spoon!"

She ended laughing. There was a good deal of misnomer and petulance in her notion that she did not like Alan: she liked him only too much. There had been a dozen times when she had started to explain to him that he was the light of his mother's silly old eyes, and even aimlessly to beg him to be good to her because he was the only human being in the world who had it in his power to be good to her; but she had not the habit of begging; she had only the habit of hunger.

"The *pater* is a stiff one to try a fall with," he admitted, eying her keenly with admiration for her because, as he knew, she had tried the fall in question, more than once, for his sake—and had not been thrown.

"I don't advise you not to try the fall. I advise you only to do as you like: that's the only thing worth while—at least to advise!—if one wants one's advice taken! But if you do try a fall, choose your own ground and don't be taken off your guard!"

It is proverbially easier to give advice than to follow it, in especial when the advice is to do as one likes; at least, if this is not proverbial, it ought to be. Alan was doing as he liked so far as he found it possible, but in odd moments he had his doubts how long he should find it possible at all. It was quite true that he was in a sense a Philistine with his tongue in his cheek; it was quite true that he had something up his sleeve. What he wanted was to keep it up his sleeve, so far at least as his father was concerned. It was not in his nature, except at odd moments, to anticipate difficulties. When the restraints of his boyhood were removed, he discovered the youth which he had never known, and the vague wistfulness of his earlier years gave place to an unreasoning gayety. Everything was right when something was not wrong; nothing was wrong unless one looked at it the wrong way; and the right way to look at it was with light laughter and a light word. Agreeable and disagreeable were just distinctions invented by men in a passion for classification; everything was agreeable if you liked

it; nothing was agreeable if you did not like it; and it was your own fault if you did not. The most serious misfortunes were like having your hat blown off in the street — exasperating if you chose to think them so, and a joke if you could think of the joke in time to join in the laugh. Every misfortune which had not happened to a man before had the charm of novelty; it was an experience the more; and no man could complain with reason that misfortunes lacked variety. When his horse fell on him in a hurdle-race and crushed his leg, he had learned that there is little in common cases of physical injury that a man may not bear. When he made the mistake of becoming indignant at being jostled by a middle-weight champion in a London crowd and was reduced to an inanimate pulp by a hook on the jaw, he had been made very sick and had acquired an immense admiration for the men who court "punishment"; and the passion of admiration is delightful. When he slipped on Mt. Cervin and hung over a crevice, and after three desperate efforts to pull him and the guide below him to a footing, the guide above and Howard Lidcott were panting and exhausted, — "You can cut the damned rope so far as I'm concerned," he said: "Heinrich below there may have scruples: save *him*!" The restrictions of life as he found it were the rules of the game: limitations which gave a man a chance for infinite tact and skill. He had immense respect for the Philistine; the Philistine had lived in the world a long time and knew the game and what could be done and what could not. He had an immense respect for the bishop who believed

the thirty-nine articles generally and kept his private doubts in regard to thirty of them specifically to himself, and for the politician who had a sense of the moment, and of what would take for the moment with the crowd: they obtained a substantial power which would have been impossible to them if they had aired their private *crochets*, which they might use as wisely as they knew how, while their impracticable rivals wasted themselves in criticism. Ideas existed to be put in practice, not to inspire imbecilities of Quixotism: ideals existed not as goals to be attained, but, like the points of the compass, to enable a man to lay a course definitely; and men and women existed to be manipulated. Cecil Windet was a restriction of life and a rule of the game at Estecourt; infinite tact and skill could be used in manipulating him or even in failing to manipulate him. Alan had known from the first that it would be a feat to live at home and to pursue his aims without a conflict, and had determined, if possible, to perform that feat.

VIII

HE had been successful enough in the beginning. He was one of the people who like to do things. He took a personal interest in everybody's business, including his own. Primarily what Cecil wanted of him was that he should take a proper interest in the Windet properties, and he had taken that interest with exemplary diligence. He liked rents, repairs, road-making and drains, as he would have liked to drill a regiment; he liked authority and management. Quite apart from all that, he liked Cecil. There had been a moment on his first return home when everything that he had known in his boyhood had seemed diminished and shrunken. He had felt it first when rolling through Jersey with its flat brown fields and squat undergrowth diversified by upright posts and barbed-wire fences, and its recommendations five feet high to use Syrup of Figs and Schenck's Mandrake Liver Pills and Sunlight Twin-Bar Soap. There was little but flat brown fields and squat undergrowth, barbed-wire and recommendations five feet high, between the Atlantic and the Pacific, he thought with bitter petulance, and had much ado to prevent the Great Republic from masquerading in his fancy as a gaunt illimitable province dotted with ragged villages. The prominence given to soap was hardly an off-set for the prevalence of indigestion. The house at Estcourt

looked insignificant when he arrived: there was something mean in the diminished distance from the house to the river, and the river itself, however broad, was not the noble stream that he remembered; it was at the best a tumbling expanse of liquid yellow clay. The first moment of disillusion past, however, his better reason and abiding sentiments began to assert themselves. The Great Republic was not a gaunt illimitable province dotted with ragged villages; it was one of the most significant things in the modern world: the States, with all their lynchings and vigilance committees, their tricks of politicians and insolent vulgarities, federated in the sheer rude determination, wherever the men concerned do not themselves render the thing ridiculous, to make civil liberty, equality, and at all events humanity, without respect to formulas, prevail. There was a matter-of-fact hardness and sternness in his fellow-countrymen that he relished after his years abroad: on the continent he had felt himself to be amongst a population of fantastic irritable children; and even in England the universal disposition to contend, to grumble, and to "kick," struck him as but a maturer childishness. When a man has power, kicking is not necessary; when he has no power, it brings him into contempt; in either case it makes every one about him uncomfortable and is bad manners. He respected the shrewd, unruffled scrutiny with which he found any challenge met on his return home; he respected the chaffing acquiescence if his challenge had been well taken, and the chaffing insolence if it had not. He belonged to these people and had an instinctive

knowledge of them and an instinctive affection for their cool, unimpulsive ways. Cecil Windet was simply the fine flower of all that. He was ruthlessly determined in his good intentions; he was coldly acquiescent where he had no power; he was hard as steel where he had power; in any time or station he would have been a personage. In the actual circumstances he was as plainly out of date, Alan frankly thought, as a stage-coach or an illuminated manuscript; he was a contemporary of Patrick Henry; he was by habit and conviction incapable of an idea, except in mechanics, of later date than 1776; but he was an ugly anachronism to attempt to rectify. He had done nothing in Alan's childhood to make himself superficially agreeable to the boy; he had been a stiff and vigilant disciplinarian; and Mrs. Windet had deliberately set herself the task, with a cynically open self-justification, of opposing him. She asked him for no favour and owed him none. But the austere uprightness of the man had had its effect in the end: even a boy has a crooked little sense of justice, and chivalry demands chivalry. Cecil exacted on all sides, often with great inconvenience to himself, as Alan soon learned when he became privy to the management of affairs at Estcourt, an instant fulfilment of any wish of Mrs. Windet's that could be ascertained; and her steady attitude of hostility did her case harm.

In these circumstances a good beginning was not difficult; but when it is destined that two people shall not understand each other, they might well spare themselves the pain of trying. It is as hard to conceal that

one thinks a man a back-number as to conceal love or a cough; Cecil could be in small doubt in what estimation he was held by Alan, and in still less doubt in what estimation he was held by Alan's next friends. There were two of these of whom he especially disapproved, being accustomed to look upon antagonism to himself as antagonism, one step removed, to the moral law. James Urrey had spent a month at Estcourt, and had brought sharply home to Cecil's consciousness that there were men whose standards were not his standards, and whom he could not despise. Urrey was a clean-limbed youngster of nine-and-twenty, with gifts of self-mastery and physical strength which men respect. What was hateful in him was that he thought it wholly important to be better informed than other men on matters they discussed, and not at all important to say so. He could hold his tongue in the presence of argumentative error, and listen in unruffled silence to triumphant misstatement. He was familiar with books that, in Cecil's judgment, were inimical to church and state, human honour and dignity, and spent the greater portion of his time at Estcourt in the library, poring over columns of statistics and voting-lists which had been privately prepared for him. What was most against him, he was the son of no one in particular, and had the manners, without the habits, or rather the pleasures, of a class to which he did not belong. It was definitely understood that he could ride and shoot, play polo and golf, and even knew the names of interesting things — pictures, statues, bits of music — and could make sentences about them; but he did not

want to; he preferred statistics. He was not even so gracious as to vaunt his antipathies; he would not pronounce billiards a rainy-day blight or poker a midnight pest; when a statement that he did not know how to play would excuse him from either, he made the statement; when the statement did not excuse him, he played, and commonly won. He liked travel, but not in the company of men, because men drink, and not in the company of women, because women talk, and it was his habit in company to do as others did whether he liked it or not. His business in life, after all, was to know things, and people are things, not to be known as they are unless one gives them their head, and watches them doing as they like; when they were thrust upon him, he watched them; they served to correct his statistics.

Howard Lidcott was a man of a different stamp. It is not known that any one ever saw him leap on a drawing-room table and do a clog-dance, but no one could see him half an hour without being ready to believe that he must often have resisted the temptation. When there was a woman present, he fell in love with her. "Any old" woman would do; he could discover charm in the unlikeliest places, and had a graduated affection appropriate for every age and condition. When there were two women, he fell in love with the prettier, and had no eyes for the other. Among men he was insatiably anxious to do things; what he did when alone was a mystery. Urrey was of opinion that he must need sleep, and take it—noisily, at the top of his voice; it was incredible that he should do anything without noise.

He had been Alan's boy-hero — he had been undeniably such fun ; and at college he had still been, and still was, undeniably such fun — he and his adventures, his audacities, his blunders, his scrapes, his affairs of the heart. He was the son of a neighbouring potentate, who had at one time been a beggarly surveyor or engineer, and had got rich during the war by providing the Union with damaged supplies, and richer since the war — legendarily rich, so that he could buy up Estcourt ten times over — by mismanaging certain railways : on both of which counts he deserved to be hanged, in the opinion of Cecil Windet, who never could be brought to understand that, provided a man has got and can keep the money, it is bad form to ask how he got it. Lidcott Senior had sent Howard to college with instructions not to be less magnificent than any of his companions ; and Howard's errors had not been on the side of economy. He had taken a little-boy delight in discovering the things that gold can buy, and he was still at the flood-tide of his delight ; he had discovered no limit to the things that gold can buy, if there is enough of it.

The relation of Cecil Windet toward these two was a theme for comedy. He might have dealt with them simply and summarily enough, if he had not met them in his own house and if he had not entertained a score or more of exacting ideals, among which was an ideal of hospitality. As the case stood, they converted his daily walks and rides into an exasperation and gave him an indigestion at dinner. They were not always in evidence, but at any time they might become in evidence ;

and even when they were not in the body present, their spirit pervaded Estcourt. There was no definite offence that he could charge against them, except that they belonged to a younger and a different generation; but that was quite offence enough. He was not accustomed to contradiction. To be sure they did not contradict him; they received his affirmations, when he made any, with becoming deference; but he was not a dullard to suppose that they would not have contradicted him if they had spoken out. Their mere existence was a contradiction; at least their presence at Estcourt was, on their footing as intimates of Alan. He was not accustomed to hilarity; he loved order and peace. No doubt he needed a world apart in which to realize his love; but a world apart was just what he had created for himself; and they had invaded it. Mrs. Windet enjoyed Cecil's exasperation and encouraged Howard and Urrey to say things before him that they would have kept to themselves. She did this not out of absolute malice or mischief, but partly because she liked Urrey and Howard, and partly because she was of opinion that Cecil had earned a great deal more exasperation than had ever come to him: exasperation would do him good. She liked Urrey because she admired him extravagantly; he seemed to her much the sort of man she had hoped Alan would be. She liked Howard because he admired her extravagantly; at least he gave her and every one else to understand that he did. She liked them both because she fancied that when Cecil came to know Alan, if he or any one else was destined ever to know Alan, he

would like him by contrast with Urrey and Howard. She was the last person in the world to confound what Cecil would like with what she herself liked. Cecil had been tempted a dozen times to turn on Alan and tell him that he could not endure his friends and command him to drop them. If Alan had been a girl, Cecil would have done so, and expected to be no less beloved; but a boy cannot be ordered about like a girl, which is an inconvenience. Quite apart from that, it had begun to occur to Cecil that to be beloved is an ornament of dignity. He had quarrelled first and last with almost every friend he had in the world; he was determined not to quarrel with Alan. It did not occur to him that he loved Alan, but a minute observer could have found in him all the symptoms.

IX

WHEN Estcourt had suffered invasion for about six months, a local newspaper was reported to have undergone a change of management. The *Chronicle* had long possessed the distinction of being the best of its kind. It was not recommended by careful parents to the perusal of their children, but excellence must always be admitted to be respectable. Its editors emulated the Frenchman who was not ashamed to describe anything that the Deity saw fit to let happen. They held that there is nothing so secret in the life of any one, that some one else would not be interested to know it, and they became voluble with indignation and suspicion in the presence of a closed door. An instinct for privacy was Oriental, heathenish, at the least anti-social and undemocratic, and made besides for bad morals: the *Chronicle* was strong on morals. If a man's secret were creditable to him, his fellow-citizens ought to know it; it would incite them to follow his example. If a man's secret were discreditable to him, his fellow-citizens ought to know it; exposure would incite him to repent and to reform. In either case it ought to be set out in sprightly head-lines in letters which would not be ineffective on a "poster." Under the new management the *Chronicle* changed from what

it had been only by becoming "more so." If excellence is respectable, more excellence is more respectable. The head-lines were not printed in bigger letters, because the size of the page did not permit it, but they became more sprightly, and the antagonism to privacy passed from indignant to bitter. The names of the new management, to be sure, somewhat inconsistently with the policy of the paper, were kept undisclosed, but doubtless the management had its reasons. Other people too doubtless have their reasons, but that is a detail. The *Chronicle* had always been a champion of the party normally in power in the state; it became the champion of the machine as an institution and of the "boss" or "heeler" as an individual. It averred editorially that the machine is the government; that the system elaborated by the "Fathers" would not work without the machine, and never had; and that the boss or heeler was just a public-spirited gentleman who stepped forward and volunteered to do work at once indispensable and so difficult and distasteful that, for the niggardly rewards the public offered, no one else would touch it. "Black-mail and speculation,—nonsense!" the editor exclaimed in a burst of righteous scorn. "The matter is one of plain common sense. Government by 'boss,' say your worst of it, is better than none. Be fair to it, and you must admit that it is better, and cheaper, than any government a nation of anything like the size and wealth of the United States has known. You leave the man who gives it to you to pay himself; and the amount he takes is so

small that not one of the 'best people,' who by the way are not noted for their scorn of money, is tempted to undertake the labour for the return. The boss is a benefactor: he deserves a statue, and you give him an 'investigation committee'; he is already under-paid, and you show your gratitude by trying to 'Jew him down.' Perhaps it will be said that the 'best people' have sentiments that will not permit them to do the boss's dirty work nor to take his dirty pay. Digging a ditch is dirty work, and so is hanging a condemned criminal; but if the thing is necessary, the man who does it is respectable. If any one's fine sentiments prevent him from receiving the pay, let him do the work without the pay. If any one's fine sentiments prevent him from doing the work, let his fine sentiments prevent him also from sneering at the man who does it for him, while he stands back and takes the benefits of it!"

Cecil Windet took the *Chronicle* and read it with a certain delight: he regarded it as a daily satire on the times. It gave him more to think about than any other reading he knew, and that the satire was unconscious was the very point of it. The meditations which it started often became grave enough as the day wore on, but the paper itself with its braggadocio was sheer comedy. In his early manhood it would have made him indignant, but indignation at things one cannot remedy is little more than a passionate impatience, a trick of youthful blood, and he could wait. Not believing that the devil is the Creator of heaven and earth, he was

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comfortably satisfied that in the long run all things must come about to the approbation of Cecil Windet. No one seems to know just what the "historical sense" is, about which so much is written nowadays, but there can be no doubt—whatever it is!—that Cecil lacked it. Certainly no notion ever entered his head that he and his ideals were merely opportune and provisional; and if the notion had entered his head, he would have promptly cast it into outer darkness. For this he is not to be blamed; so many good men have set him the example. The "lucid and trenchant" editorial, a part of which is quoted above, and for the whole of which a reader anxious to go really to the bottom of things is referred to the files of the *Chronicle*, Cecil regarded as the most amazingly funny bit of effrontery that he had seen. It was not his habit to publish and multiply folly by calling attention to it: the *Chronicle* did that: but this editorial put him out of his precepts; he spoke of it to Alan.

"To be sure the world is going to the dogs: it always has been—without ever getting there, which is a daily miracle; but I doubt whether it has ever proceeded on its way with quite so jaunty an air," he commented. "A man who can write like that commands the same admiration as a rogue who goes gayly to be hanged; they both rob a nasty thing of half its unpleasantness by robbing themselves of all title to be considered human. They are public benefactors in their way."

"Every generation fails to go to the dogs in a new way: there would be a mere monotony of miracle else! You are merciful to the rogue and unmerciful to the

editor: the *Chronicle* is the last fashionable experiment, and the editor is merely the servant of the *Zeitgeist*—whatever that means; he is the end man in the minstrels who says things to give the other end man a chance for a clever retort."

"*Zeitgeist* means anything that a man is too lazy to put a stop to," said Cecil, stepping to a window to take an observation on the weather. He might know little about the *Zeitgeist*, but he was an expert in weather. "The last fashionable experiment in my day was cutting the trees that held the spring floods in check and not planting any in their stead, and we shall all have the deuce to pay for it within three days. The last fashionable experiment in your day is rooting out the ideas that hold men together in an orderly life, and not planting other ideas in their stead, and we are all having the deuce to pay for that already, and the bill to the deuce will grow bigger. The last fashionable experiment in your day is that the many who have nothing to say shall say it and that the few who have something to say shall stand mute. There is that friend of yours, Urrey, who looks oracles and says it's a fine day when it isn't: why does he keep his oracles to himself? There is that friend of yours, Lidcott, who takes a pride in exercising every faculty that God has given him except his wits: why doesn't he explain to the society editor of the *Chronicle* how much good manners can be taught in a drubbing? And you yourself who are the pride of my declining years and all that sort of thing, and are besides the chosen companion of these two celebrities: is there nothing to be expected

of you? You belong to your generation; you ought to know how to speak to it. *I don't! I don't possess the language.*"

Alan had had time to meditate during this address: he had for some months foreseen that he must one day "have it out" with his senior, but had reflected that pusillanimity covers a multitude of sins, and that the first duty of a son is not to vex his father before he finds it unavoidable. He began to find it unavoidable.

"You underestimate the folly of my generation: the oracle has spoken: the *Chronicle* is the oracle; and the prophet is not honoured, amongst the elders, in his own country. The editorial you find so amazing was written by the man you have chosen to refute it; it was written by Urrey."

Cecil Windet was not given to theatrical gesture, even under the stimulus of surprise; he continued his observation of the sky. Alan smoked and waited for the sky to fall.

"I begin to know how far I am behind the times," said Cecil. "I begin to penetrate the secret of the new management of the *Chronicle*. Urrey writes the editorials and Lidcott does the society notes: of what portion of the new faith are you the expositor? You perhaps draw the pictures and make the head-lines!"

"I? — I am the new management: *I own the Chronicle.*"

X

ALAN's portentous announcement bore all the marks of a terrible event without consequences. Cecil had stood for some minutes with his back to Alan, and when he took up the conversation again spoke of graver affairs, namely the business of the day. The gravity of human concerns, like the gravity of material bodies, decreases with the distance. It could serve no purpose of Alan's to press the conversation; he had been disagreeable up to the point of honour: he was not obliged to be disagreeable beyond the point of honour, to the point of calamity; and Cecil no doubt needed time to meditate the paternal paradox, that a young man must belong to his own generation because he cannot help himself, but must hold the opinions of a generation not his own, whether he can or not, on pain of filial sacrilege.

Perhaps the terrible event was deprived of its natural consequences by the menace of an event still more terrible—the greater includes the less!—which was announced to Alan by his mother.

"By the way, Alan,—all disagreeable things are by the way in the 'best possible of worlds'—Isabel is coming," Mrs. Windet said one afternoon when she was making tea for Alan, and making it badly. She was perfectly aware that she was making it badly, but con-

soled herself with the reflection that she was doing her duty. "It's a point of honour amongst well-bred women in the present century," she added, "to do everything badly that they have to do with their hands, just as it was a point of honour amongst well-bred women in the last century to spell badly. Have some bad tea and compliment me on it. You have a chance at once to show your affection for your mother and to keep your diplomacy supple, as the woman who plays the harp in the opera, and doesn't play it often, rubs her hands and practises her fingerings between whiles."

Alan took the proffered cup and tasted it.

"The quality of the tea, which is perfection, is excelled only by the skill with which it has been prepared, and the wit of the exordium with which it was served. I wish you might pass on the secret of the making, and the wit, to every household that I may not name, where I am occasionally obliged to take tea. But I don't see what that has to do with Isabel, nor with her coming being by the way and therefore disagreeable; she always struck me as rather charming; perhaps because she is a cousin and therefore safe. Most women would be charming if most women were not unsafe."

"You will never be really a diplomatist, Alan; you are too much a man. No woman wants to be praised for skill and wit before you have set her mind at rest about more important matters: you might as well praise her husband or her sister before you have praised her bonnet. She wants to know that you think her beauti-

ful, especially the major part of herself which is her gown; and that you find her 'different' from every one else, and more adorable. It seems natural and right to her that the Lord should have made her perfection; and her opinions, and her papa's, and her clergyman's, perfection; she does not want any one to tell her these things in order to confirm her certainty of them; she wants to be told them in order to be sure that the speaker is not immoral or silly. When he has once satisfied her on that point he may praise her wit or anything else he chooses. As to Isabel, you show a singularly male perception: she is nothing like so nice as I, though I'm afraid her gowns are prettier than mine; and as for being safe!—she is worse than dangerous, she is fatal: you are to marry her."

"I? Never in the world. When I got so far in my studies as to find it unlawful for a man to marry his mother, I determined to live celibate. Besides, Isabel is my cousin: I don't know that I ever thought about the matter before, but I'm firmly convinced that I have believed always the marriage of cousins wicked; even of second cousins."

"Yes," said Mrs. Windet, ignoring Alan's protest, "it is the one thing which reconciles a woman to her son's marrying, that his wife can never be so good a woman as herself, and that she will probably make him unhappy. There is nothing like a happy marriage to deprive a mother of her son. Yes, I daresay I approve of your marrying Isabel. At all events you must make up your mind to it: the thing has been planned for years. When

a woman ceases to be interested in making her own marriage, or in making a success of it, she becomes interested in making a marriage for some one else."

"Just as a man who has gone through a horrible initiation into a secret society is anxious to persuade his friends to join. Thanks; I don't intend to join; I would even rather take another cup of tea!"

Alan had told the bare truth when he said that he did not intend to "join," though the reasons which he gave were, perhaps, not those which had governed his decision. There were reasons which were good to keep and reasons which were good to give, and it was usually the former which were good to act upon. This was, perhaps, a pity for any one whose article of faith officially was that of the editor of the *Chronicle*, but actual life was more complex than the official faith of the editor of the *Chronicle*. Alan, Urrey, and Howard had agreed, in the wisdom of grave youth, that they would never marry: Alan, because a woman is a clog and he travels the fastest who travels alone; Urrey, because the modern woman ridiculously fails to understand that she is a female, an evolutionary makeshift solely for purposes of reproduction; and Howard, because man is by nature imperfectly monogamous, and for himself he didn't see the use of pretending to be what he was not.

What was more to the point, there was a six months' respite before Isabel was to arrive; and in the meantime Cecil's prediction of an immediate penalty for the last fashionable experiment in his day was verified. The spring rains melted the spring snows, and the river had

business to do which could not be conducted within its banks. The *Chronicle* issued extras, ornamented with woodcuts, by its special artist, of tracts of country and city laid waste by the flood; and published interviews with the oldest inhabitants in regard to previous floods, and with men of technical knowledge in regard to the causes of floods and of things in general; whereby the oldest inhabitants and men of technical knowledge made money, the *Chronicle* increased its value as an advertising sheet, and the public, who paid, got much inaccurate information. When no oldest inhabitant or specialist was at hand, the reporters of the *Chronicle* did not stick at interviewing one in an imaginary dialogue, "just for a filler"; setting down, not perhaps what any one actually said, but what some one ought to have said. The gas-works were flooded, and the city passed the night in darkness made visible by lamps and candles; even the water-works were menaced, which seemed an irony; whole streets were turned into impromptu canals, and families moved upstairs into second-story and even third-story quarters; the railways were cut off and the populace were menaced with famine. The *Chronicle* recorded the price of petroleum and of candles; compared the impromptu canals to those of Venice; photographed families distinguished by their distress, and published notes and jottings on their intimate life: the *Chronicle* sacrificed to the great western Mammon, which is enterprise. To do the paper justice, there were incidents of manly pluck and daring in the time of flood, to which it gave a wider celebrity than mere neighbourhood gossip could have given: the

Chronicle was not a worshipper of Mammon only, it worshipped and sacrificed to minor gods also; it was an amiable polytheist, anxious in its devotions to neglect no shrine. It headed a subscription for the relief of the distressed, with a sum becomingly magnificent in a potentate; it insisted, in a spirit of righteousness which all good people will recognize, that other potentates should become as virtuous as itself; it did not stick at hinting, in personal interviews with reluctant donors, that an immediate revival of certain racy domestic and business scandals would be timely, in particular with details never yet published but carefully kept on file in the *Chronicle* archives, to be used in case of need; it showed itself alternately as an angel of mercy distributing bread and blankets, and as an angel of beneficent black-mail, compelling the strong to remember their duty to the weak. The *Chronicle* said, editorially, that it is good that life should be a battle, and that in "industrialism," too, there should be captains of tens and captains of hundreds, and that the strong of hand or brain should rule the weak; but that in time of stress or danger the captain must stand ready to spend or expose himself beyond the duty of the meanest soldier, or there is no brave work in life to be done except with horse and spear.

Both the Lidcotts and the Windets owned strips of property along the river-front, and neither of them was slow in coming to the aid of his tenants, and others not his tenants: the senior Lidcott because there had been years together when he thought of the kingdom of heaven as a place where he should spend money freely and have it to

spend, the senior Windet because it pleased him to play that he was the father of his people and lord of the soil. To be sure, the game was obsolete, and for the most part his "people" declined to play it, much preferring to play, even in rags, the modern game of "I'm-as-good-as-you"; which also is not without its seductive element of make-believe. Any reason, the *Chronicle* said, however, — past shame or present pride, — was to a man's honour if it made him wise and kind and strong for others and for himself; and though the edict had gone forth, it seemed, that it was best the "submerged tenth" should die, it was not best the submerged tenth should die by accident of flood, or famine, or anything except broken spirit and broken heart, and of those only because they are incurable, and pitiful and terrible beyond what the stoutest on-looker can bear. Urrey had hailed the flood as a chance in a million for a man who loved the public and wanted to show it and to be loved in return for benefits bestowed.

"Get a move on, my infants; things are comin' your way: any lover who has the courage of his convictions ought to pray for disaster to the beloved object!" he counselled his two comrades; "that is simply to pray the most lawful of all prayers, that he may be of service. No matter what dates you've got, they are all off; you've a prior engagement at the riverside; go and get wet, and become great in the land, and I will cause you to be villainously woodcutted in the *Chronicle*. If you should happen to be drowned, you shall be famous: I will write your epitaph. If you escape drowning, you shall swagger

all your days amongst a devoted populace, because some halfdozen sooty mechanics were hungry and you gave them food, or were shelterless and you gave them shelter, at the cost of less risk and discomfort than you have undergone five times a year, since I have known you, in what you are pleased to think fun. It is almost disgustingly easy to be good in an emergency; and if I supply the brains, and the epitaph, the least you can do is to take the wet skin."

It is an incident of the strong turn for conduct in people of the English race that they are given to both hypocrisies: the grave hypocrisy of pretending to be better than they are, and the humorous hypocrisy of pretending to be worse. Alan and Howard assured each other cheerfully, and permitted themselves to be assured by Urrey, that they were a pair of monumental cheats, and spent themselves in providing meat and blankets for people who pertinaciously refused not to be at home when their houses should be swept from their foundations or collapsed; and in providing transport for people whose obstinacy changed in the terror of the night to a frantic wish to set foot on dry land; and in providing rescue from the waves for those whose obstinacy had changed too late.

One gray windless morning when the day broke in dimness and the rain fell in level lines, Alan and Howard were pulling in an open boat some miles up the river from the amphitheatre among the hills in which the city lies. They had been abroad all night, trying, Alan said, to earn their epitaph. Howard had lost his

heart in their domiciliary visits, as he reckoned, to three maids and to two matrons.

"Ripping girl that last: last girl always is," he said; "eyes, shape, hair, even hands and feet and a complexion. That girl will be the wife of the butcher or baker or candlestick-maker; and yet people pity the lower orders. No man with an object of *vertù* like that in his house needs any one's pity. I've got to quit this slumming: my organ of affection's overworked; got fatty enlargement of the heart these past five days. Bla-ast the rain, a man can't smoke."

Among the houses where the water lapped and swirled at a level with the second-story windows, they had heard what seemed a distant handbell ringing with intermittent fury from a direction, as near as they could judge, in which a handbell had no business to be. They had pulled out into the main stream where the water ran in ugly ripples breast-high. The river was a mile wide at that point, and loose beams, "saw-logs," masses of drift, were flung forward as from a catapult. The rowing gave them every chance, now that they had earned their epitaph, to lay instant claim to it. The object of their search, they found, was a figure seated on the roof of the wreck of a house afloat. When they came within speaking distance they discovered that the figure was a girl. She was seated with her back against the base of a chimney, and sheltered herself from the rain as best she could with what remained of a baby-blue silk sunshade.

"Makes the place look like 'home and mother,'" said Howard; "a mere man might have thought of an um-

rella, but never of a baby-blue sunshade and a support for his back! Cats and women for comfort. She's got her nerve with her, all the same."

She did not speak until the oars had been shipped and the boat rose and fell in the ripple that washed the eaves.

"Nice day to-morrow, if it don't rain," she said grimly; "pity you wouldn't ask me to take a row with you."

"Come down and have one 'on me,'" said Howard. It was quite true she had her nerve with her.

"Don't care if I do, since you press me; except that ma's very particular; never lets me talk to any one that isn't properly introduced. We don't associate with none but the first fam'lies."

"That's all right; always ask 'references' myself," said Howard, who had noticed that the girl, not to be an exception to a universal rule, possessed an eye and a shape and minor causes of delirium; "tuck your heels under you and slide; and don't be so glad to see us that you swamp the boat. You needn't bring that bell either: it reminds me that man is made to mourn until he has breakfasted."

"Cut it out, you two, and get a move on," said Alan, holding the boat clear of the shingles.

The girl looked down on them with a bold, comely good humour. She was underbred and impudent no doubt, but, even to Alan, charming enough in her dimpled youth and her unabashed free companionship. Her speech and accent were reckless and droll rather

than vulgar, the speech and accent of a soubrette, who had the pluck to play her part on a bit of scaffolding, adrift in the tumbling river, to no better audience than two boatmen in dripping "oilers." She was hard hit by the loss and ruin of her clothes, and within five minutes had been plying her bell frantically in a panic for her life, but that was no reason why she should not "jolly them along."

"Oh, very well," she said; "I suppose I got to go with you, if you insist; been sittin' here till I'd kind of got used to it." She dropped her bell and sunshade and prepared for her descent. "Pity to part with that parasol: it once was new. Ready? — all right: don't look at my ankles: they're the only ones I got."

XI

Of course it is vulgar to like any but the best things, and it is worse than vulgar, is immoral even, for a man to like any but the best women. A properly constituted man should read none but the best books, give heed to none but the best pictures, delight in none but the best music, frequent only people as good as himself, except when he feels it his duty to set an example; should wear only his best clothes, never speak except when he has something to say, marry a woman for her virtues, and practise impeccability and etiquette with her forever after. It is not to be denied that such people exist and possess a special charm, and if the inventory of their qualities sounds satirical, that perhaps is because such people are few. Howard and Alan were not properly constituted: they said that people who go in only for the exquisite know nothing in its proportions as it exists, not even their own exquisiteness, and are capable of giving so much bad advice in sentences so prettily set together, that they ought not to be left at large; they ought for the public good to be confined to country and suburban villas, where they should be on view, like a collection of orchids, Wednesdays and Sundays from two to four in the afternoon. Howard and Alan did not read the best books only, they read the

Chronicle, the files in the archives of the *Chronicle*, the city tax-lists and election returns. They were of opinion that these things would enable them to give advice not bad, and if their sentences should not be very prettily set together, well! — almost no one knew or cared whether sentences were set together prettily or the reverse of prettily. To be sure almost no one knew or cared whether advice was good or bad; every one being determined beforehand to take nobody's advice except his own, but that was a detail. Howard and Alan gave heed to woodcuts and posters, professed a delight in the rattle of street-pianos and popular songs, and had not the least impulse to look upon the girl whom they found on the house-top merely as an occasion for displaying an example. They had thought that Dora Crispin, as they learned to call her, was great fun when she tripped in her descent and tumbled into Howard's arms with an impetus that half submerged the boat. They thought that she was out and away "well plucked," when they discovered that when she tripped she did not loose her hold on a treasure that she held in her lap, and that the treasure was a petted and very sleepy and trustful tom-cat. They thought her still more out and away well plucked, when they discovered that the cat was dry as tinder and purring with content, and that the girl had put up her bold "front" when she was all but exhausted with wet and cold. They told afterwards, in Urrey's disorderly quarters, where nothing was in place except certain aids to anecdote, which are always in place so long as the boxes or bottles that

contain them are visible, how she had all but fainted — “gone out,” they said — when they had rescued her. They recounted in minute details the droll pantomime with which she accepted and drank the brandy that they offered her, the droll things that she said afterward, the airs and graces she went to the expense of for their entertainment in arranging the coat and mackintosh they gave her, the lavishness with which she paid her way. They compared her, much to her advantage, with a lady who met them at the water’s edge on the Kentucky side, to which, as much the nearer, they had found themselves obliged to turn, because the need of dry clothes and of shelter was pressing: a lady who seemed in charge of a relief committee, and who gave orders at once with an impersonal benignancy that Dora should be cared for, and who vaguely disliked Dora at sight, and whom Dora hated at sight with no vagueness whatever. Like Dora she, too, was young and “paid with her person,” and paid, Howard said, lavishly; but only because she could not help it. She paid presumably as little as she could; she was one of the “nice girls” who make it a point of honour to go through life quietly demanding everything and giving nothing; she was a prodigious egoist, who fancied she had earned the kingdom of heaven if she consented reluctantly to allow herself to be adored.

“I know the type,” said Urrey the misogynist; “they make good daughters because papa is to leave them money and may change his will; and bad lovers, bad wives, and bad mothers, because they have been taught to be, and have nothing much to gain by being good.

Every one about them has got into the habit of expecting so little of them that the meanest little act of devotion is looked upon as a miracle of heroism; and they have got into the habit of expecting so little of themselves that they themselves look upon their mean little decencies of politeness as prodigies of devotion. 'Nice girls' are mannerly nonentities, except for purposes of destruction; the soubrette is worth a dozen of them—and a man with anything to do in the world had better be hanged than lose his head about the soubrette. A man with anything to do in the world may care for horses and dogs and for his kids, but he had better be hanged than care for his home; when a man wants to be comfortable he has begun to die, and an easy chair is a preliminary coffin."

Alan cried *bravo* and *bis*, unmindful of the powers that rule, and that neither forget nor forgive, and Howard chanted to an improvised music:—

"Eagle, snakes these women are:
Take them on the wing! but war,
Smoking war's the warrior's wife."

"There may be profit for the warrior notwithstanding," Howard added mischievously, "in a habit like mine of disinterested interest in the women along his line of march. Instead of discoursing soberly about supplies and storehouses, I made inquiries of the bystanders; Alan has been face to face with his hereditary enemy without knowing it; the lady by the riverside was Cecily Elderlin, the only daughter of Charles Elderlin."

XII

URREY had noticed, or believed afterward that he had noticed, a certain displeasure on the part of Alan during Howard's elaborate comments on Miss Elderlin. At the period when the people at Estcourt and at Soames made a point of seeing each other almost daily, Cecil had established a public ferry, which he had subsequently leased: some days after Howard's revelation, Urrey noticed also, or believed he noticed, that Alan thought the wharves on the Kentucky side in much greater need of inspection than before. He remarked impersonally that he saw a chance for an effective leader in a young politician whose benevolence was too great to be confined within the state line, even when the state line was a raging flood; and suggested that the society editor of the *Chronicle* be dismissed as incompetent, having for days been face to face with a most entertaining item, and having taken no notice of it. He assured Alan that his canvass would be made no end easier by his appearance in woodcuts as the Alexander of a more civilized Macedon, with tears of printer's ink to shed because there was no more distress to conquer; and that even the item in the society column would serve to keep him before the public, there being nothing so secret in the life of any one that it is not of interest to some one else. Alan ad-

mitted frankly enough that when he inspected the ferry property on the Kentucky side, he made a point usually of inspecting also the schoolhouses and other buildings dedicated to the use of refugees from the flood; and to himself admitted also, with an utter frankness, that his attention to those refugees in particular, rather than to others nearer home, was an incident in a desire to obtain a closer view of Cecily Elderlin.

The pertinacity of that desire appeared to him by no means due to her intrinsic merits. Quite plainly there were adventitious reasons for his interest in her, and it was an interest there would be small opportunity to satisfy at any later time. He had seen her, as it chanced, but once before — in his boyhood, in the streets of Cincinnati, when she had been pointed out to him by the indiscretion of a servant as the little girl that should have been his playmate and his sweetheart; but he had taken a boy's romantic interest in the duel, in his father's adversary, in the daughter of his father's adversary, and had looked across at the white pillars and forbidden grounds of Soames with a boy's shy curiosity and pride. Had there been no duel, she and not his cousin Isabel would in all likelihood have been chosen by his elders for his wife; and though by reason of their choice he would no doubt have conceived an aversion from her, yet as matters stood, the fact that she would have been chosen constituted a distinction, and, in a general indifference toward women, to be on any ground distinguished was to exercise a special charm. She was the fine flower of the nice girl — the nice girl with the promise of the great lady in her; when

she was spoken to, her eyes sparkled with kindness and with intelligence; when her face was in repose, it was a picture of self-sufficing gentleness and pride. She was a mark for beggars and for people in distress as far as they could see her; she would have been hurried to the scaffold without form of trial by a revolutionary mob. But it was by no means as the fine flower of the nice girl, he told himself, that she possessed for him a special charm. In Urrey's chambers he had not taken an active part in the comparison between the nice girl and the soubrette; but he had felt no great dissent from the things that Urrey and Howard said. He did not hold the nice girl responsible for the conditions under which she was born and bred, and to which she was sacrificed, and he was himself not in the least disposed to seek a substitute in the soubrette; but from the point of view of any respectable serviceable human existence he had no doubt the nice girl was a mistake, a princess without a principality, and with no hope of obtaining one, unless some "nice young man" should be fool enough to give her his, and to permit her to mismanage it. Living as she did in the woman's invisible hareem of permitted sights and sounds, she could not have and could not obtain knowledge enough to do anything with a principality except mismanage it; and in the meantime she was out and away a more expensive institution than the soubrette, and not half so amusing. Her charities were like her golf and her whist, neither of them, commonly, first-rate, and both mere diversions to keep her from discovering where she stood in the order of created things, and from doing

herself a mischief accordingly. And yet, at the end of a few weeks, he was perfectly aware that if he were bent on being fool enough to play the rôle of nice young man, he would offer Cecily his principedom.

He did not impiously deny that marriages are made in heaven; he inclined rather to believe that marriages are made wholesale in heaven. Heaven sent wives as it sends the season's hat or the day's dinner, by thousands; it is doubtless preappointed which hat and which dinner a given man shall get, but any one of a hundred other hats or dinners would have served his turn. Or rather, to drop similitudes and speak by the letter, man was an animal with a special instinct making him a woman's natural prey; he was her breakfast muffin, her spring bonnet, her maid-of-all-work. Alan for his own part purposed taking to his heels in time, as any discreet breakfast muffin or spring bonnet would, if it had heels to take to. The most that any woman could do for a man was to encourage him, to spur him on, to keep him up to the mark; and the man who needed the spur was a man who did not count; and the man who did not want the spur was scarcely wise to provide himself with one. He caught himself thinking that no woman he had ever met had spoken in a voice so clear and pure, or presented to him so clear and pure a face, or given him, when she gave it at all, so frank and so dainty a hand, or moved or stood with a grace so convincing. On reflection he was sure his mother's hand must be as frank and dainty, and her paces and pauses to the full as graceful, and Cecily's voice and face no gentler than a thousand little *diablesses*

before her had possessed. He could not make his eyesight back up his reflection, but that was what a man's reason was designed for — to contradict his eyes when his eyes took orders from his passions. He found himself preposterously inclined to overpraise all that she said and did. He had asked her whether she spent much of her time in work among the poor, and not without hilarity challenged her to justify herself for withdrawing so great a portion of her effort from her serious interests.

"Such as flaccid golfing, you mean," she had retorted, "timid riding, feeble driving, reading books that I do not understand, forming 'opinions' that give me the headache, eating bonbons, and searching with professional diligence for the husband. As it happens, I do not play even bad golf, but I do not see why you should laugh at me for that; still less why you should laugh at girls who have the pluck, which I have not, at least to try things in which they cannot succeed. If they are weak, their weakness is punishment enough without your ridicule." She ended smiling.

"I beg your pardon; the notion of laughing at you, or them, never entered my head; you will think perhaps that I am laughing even while I make my apologies; the simple truth is, girls are one of the powers of the earth, the one of which I am most afraid. I should as soon think of going to Constantinople to laugh at the Grand Turk; I am too much concerned to save my own head. To be quite honest with you, — always a perilous feat in dealing with a potentate! — one might laugh at your work amongst the poor if it did not do such bitter harm

that one feels more like praying — or swearing ! — than like laughing. I'm not talking about public disasters like flood or famine, when no one can go far wrong; and I'm not counting the cases in which you may be cheated; the passion of resentment at being cheated is a mean little passion at best; and I know nothing about your personal efforts, which may be directed by divine inspiration; I should think that wholly probable. But in the cases I have known anything about, the lady patroness has simply found it more amusing to mind some one else's business, any one else's business, rather than her own, and has either outraged, or else broken down, the self-respect of the people in whom she found an interest that her own life did not offer her. Seriously, she would have been kinder if she had found some other occupation than that of amateur meddler. And that's a grave speech, with all kinds of ridiculous assumptions of wisdom in it, which you can laugh at when you will."

She looked at him for a moment with an expression half of raillery, half of challenge. "I believe you *are* afraid of girls, though in spite of your fear you despise them; you think of them as of some sort of poisonous shrub which is respectable only for the harm that it can do if one does not give it a wide berth. I daresay I may be unwise and unkind enough in having made myself an amateur meddler; but you don't know, I am sure, what a girl's life is. Whatever a man does, he is in touch with the great world and lives its big out-of-door life: a girl can touch it only in the smart set of a political capital, or through her church, or by her

charities. She has a right to live, even if she has to kill some one to enjoy the privilege! Fancy yourself prisoned in four walls, with no way to escape except by exasperating Mrs. Pantellini's landlord by forcing him to clear away the pestilential rubbish in her backyard, and exasperating Mrs. Mantinelli's doctor, who is killing her baby in obedience to obsolete medical opinion, by calling in your own doctor, who kills it in obedience to medical opinion that is up to date. You too would exasperate both the landlord and the doctor, and take your chances of preventing their revenging themselves afterward; and would drive Mr. Pantellini and Mr. Mantinelli to a frenzy by forcibly changing things in their households which they like, but which in a household of your own you could not tolerate. And you would not believe, even if you could not defend yourself against the accusation, that you had been doing harm! And you would think the plea, that it is Mr. Pantellini and not you who must live in his home, ridiculous. There's a grave speech for your grave speech, with enough bad logic in it, no doubt (I'm not sure: I never know what logic means), to make the laughter even."

Alan had thought her speech capital at the time, in particular for its good temper and its appeal for fairness; and she had had a struggle with an evident shyness at finding herself speaking effectively, which stirred his sense of chivalry. She had stood to her guns, she was a brave little woman, he had said to himself in the first moments after he left her; but when the first

moments had passed, he asked himself why she should not stand to her guns? Women for whom not a thousandth part as much is done stand to theirs. Why should she not have common humanity enough to wish to be alive, and common sense enough to say so plainly, and common pluck enough to conquer a shyness that would have tied her tongue? Urrey was right: every one had got into the habit of expecting so little of them that the meanest little act of spontaneity or intelligence was looked upon as a miracle of heroism. Her speech was good, but Urrey said a dozen better things in an hour, and he had never felt a reverence for Urrey, still less an impulse to marry him. To be sure Urrey had not spoken with her voice; but he was not minded to marry any woman for her voice. Certainly he was not in a mood in which according to prevailing ideas he could make a "model husband" at all. "If she had wanted gold to eat, he would not have thought it good enough for her," he had heard said of one of his chums; and he had seen perhaps a score of women who thought nothing too good for themselves and for whom their lovers thought nothing good enough. They had seemed to him very ordinary human beings on the whole. If a pallet and a plain ungarnished room in which to work had been good enough for Goethe, and a soldier's fare, and more than a soldier's labour, and lodging for the night on the tented field, good enough for Aurelius, he must lack some sense that other men possessed if the women he knew were not paid to the height of their desert, and overpaid.

On the evening when he reached this conclusion Mrs. Windet announced to him that a great piece of good luck had befallen him. Isabel had changed her plans: she would reach Estcourt earlier than she had expected; she would arrive within a week.

XIII

ISABEL WINDET was a tall, trim blonde of twenty-two, with a complexion, a profile, and a metallic definiteness and firmness of outline. People said that she possessed the objective temperament, which means that they could never tell what she was thinking about or whether she was thinking at all; they could tell only that she was very much awake. When she moved she moved lightly and quickly, with the directness and power of a shaft shot by a strong steel spring; when she explained she explained afterward, and had small faith in words of more than one syllable. She liked games in which there was a chance of some one's being disabled, and hated conversation and psychology; she was a capital shot, and Alan could not complain that her riding and driving were either flaccid or timid. Howard said that what she did not know about a horse was little worth knowing, and that she betted on the races by inspiration—which he himself, by the way, did not; and Urrey said she looked every man between the eyes to see what use she could make of him, and professed an unaccustomed admiration of her. He did not say he liked her, he said she was as negotiable as a new bank-note or a "gilt-edged" bond; and the men who had seen her knew what he meant. She knew what she wanted and

saw no reason why she should not reach out her hand and take it. She had quarrelled with her papa, Preston Windet, when he had married Mrs. Emmett Denzil, and after his death had contested and broken his will, hugely to her mamma-in-law's loss and to Cecil Windet's satisfaction, who had had small respect for his elder brother. She had dealt generously by such of her father's dependents and relatives as had been good to her, and had declined to be moved by any sort of appeal in behalf of those who had not. They had backed their judgment, she said crisply, they must take their luck, as a wedded wife does, for better or for worse. She had spent a season in Washington and two in New York, had neither professed to enjoy herself nor to be bored, and had come away without a line of fatigue beneath her quiet gray eyes, and without a flutter in that perfect bit of anatomical machinery that filled her pulses. Why she had set her face toward Estcourt was no one's business but her own.

Her first concern on her arrival had been to inspect the kennels and the stable and to provide for the reception of certain beasts of her own. Apart from that, she had manifested during the first days of her stay no trenchant impulses whatever. She had understood before she came that she would find a divided household in Estcourt; the gossip about the subject was really delicious; the price that Cecil had paid for privacy, and had forced Mrs. Windet to pay, had purchased a legend with variations, each more intrepid than the last. Isabel disliked gossip, and disapproved on principle of divided

households as being in bad form; but she was perfectly aware that like many things of which in the abstract she disapproved, they were convenient. She knew the hostility between the two heads of the house, she perceived the antagonism between Cecil and Howard and Urrey, she divined a dramatic situation of some sort between Cecil and Alan. For purposes of her own she was a delicate observer, and by the time she had been in the house three days with people, could explain them, to her own satisfaction, as if she had made them, from the amount of vinegar they took with their compliments to the sort of pepper they took with their salad. Direct misstatements for the sake of pleasing she did not deal in, and every line of her head and bust proclaimed her capable of even a losing fight for an opinion: in the matter of flattery she preferred good works to good words, finding them at once more effective and less compromising. Among good works she included intonations and facial expression, and she could ask after one's digestion in an accent that was tantamount to a declaration of fidelity. Cecil she regarded as a colonel without a regiment and bewildered by its absence. For him she was punctual at all family functions; attentive when he spoke; interested even when her attentiveness provoked disquisition as its just punishment; interested even when the disquisition dealt with rents and drainage. She rather liked him; she hated nothing but ineffectiveness. Mrs. Windet she thought a *grande dame* with a tongue, a huge indolence, and a protracted attack of pouting; incidentally a bit of a fool not to have managed thoroughly a man

so incapable as Cecil of concealment, reticence, or counter-stratagem. The tongue she made no effort to defend herself against, knowing effort at defence to be useless: do what she might, she would be stung to death in metaphor when her aunt found occasion to point and to envenom the proper phrases. To the indolence she ministered like an inspired maid-in-waiting, and made her aunt conscious of a hundred fatigues which had escaped her notice until she found herself relieved of them. Moreover, when Mrs. Windet's gown was such that she would be glad to hear it described, Isabel described it with a curt exactitude which was an evidence of her sincerity; when the gown was of a wholly different kind, she "looked" a description more complimentary than any she ever put into words: both of which facts Mrs. Windet observed and filed for reference; but she liked the caresses even while she suspected them. Howard Lidcott Isabel thought a man of ability because he adored her; and she permitted him to make her all the pretty speeches he could think of. She listened to him with an impersonal tranquil attention, as if he were a small boy reciting a lesson. It does a man good to make pretty speeches — it encourages the growth in him of the sentiments that correspond to them; at all events, if he make the speeches often enough, he will find himself in honour bound to believe them; in either case to the profit of his listener. James Urrey she thought a man still abler than Howard, precisely because he did not adore her. She spoke to him as to a male intelligence without illusions, dealt with him in utter honesty,

tactfully relieved him of a dozen engagements which he was at a loss how to escape, and, in order to facilitate some investigations of his into the origin of great fortunes in the United States, made over to him her father's private papers, some of which were very private indeed. Therefore these four people none of them were quite at ease in their own minds about Isabel; but on reflection they joined cordially, almost eagerly, in giving her good words; their lack of ease about her gave them a sense of guilt, and they hastened to do penance. Toward Alan she behaved in accordance with a reading of cousinship which made him a present of all the advantages, and deprived him of all the disadvantages, of regarding her as a sister. These things she did by way of reconnaissance in force; when she was sure of her ground she visited Thomas Peyton, of Peyton, Wayne, & Thurber, counsellors.

Amongst those who knew him Thomas Peyton's name spelt wisdom for this world, which is more nearly identical with wisdom for the next world also than is supposed to be admitted by either the little boy's copy-book moralist or the little boy's primer cynic, two personages as fanciful as Jack the Giant-Killer. He was a scarred veteran in the battle of life, an honest *condottiere*, of opinion that man is an animal mainly and rightly predatory who loses his health and spirits if he becomes pacific, and that the finished "man of the world" is the most satisfactory and the kindest creature alive. He was a scholar in practical expedients, a spear and buckler in the hands of his friends' honour, with not a little

consciousness of the traditional connection between jurisprudence and gentle birth and breeding, and a steady sense that, in a world which God has made, *noblesse oblige* is the rule of successful conduct, and that the technicalities of the law exist only for purposes of defence. He was perhaps a little vain of his magnanimity; he was certainly a little vain of his keen gray face and soldierly erectness, and of his gift for obtaining by open dealing results that might well be aimed at ineffectually by chicanery, as a man might be vain of his skill in obtaining by white magic what the servants of the devil might try ineffectually to gain by black. Any one who endeavoured to use him as a cat's-paw, or to enlist his services, under whatever disguise, in making a bad matter worse, was likely to be shown somewhat roughly to the door; he had been known even, among the titters of his clerks, to kick a would-be client down the stairs. For the rest he was convinced that a *bon mot* is a flash-light no fog of ignorance or pretence can prevent from illuminating any object it is turned upon, and that a man must be serving the power that makes for righteousness, who was so deferentially received in court and whose briefs gave the bench and bar so much pause. He had been Cecil Windet's adviser for years, and through him had become Isabel's, in whose behalf he had exerted so much talent that he was fond of her. She reminded him of learned joys and elderly triumphs, and it was a pair of very kind shrewd old eyes that he fixed on her when he had picked his way out of the orderly rows of books on the floor about his chair and come forward to welcome

her. She herself had felt that — Preston Windet, her father, apart — the solid block of a man before her was of all the people she had happened to know the one least likely to be led astray or beguiled or checked. These immunities she esteemed unstintingly, and when they were combined with an open admiration for herself she thought them almost reverend. It is pleasing to please, and she had showered little gifts and attentions upon him, which were the expression of a sufficiently sincere gratitude to him for liking her.

“Good morning; of course you are busy, and I beg your pardon for coming here and interrupting you; you would, no doubt, have found it more convenient to come to see me; at least, that is a girl’s notion of convenience: but I want to make what I am doing look businesslike; I daresay because it cannot at best be made to look very businesslike. I want’ to commit a fraud and want you to help me: if you will not, I shall commit it anyhow; the only difference your refusal will make is that I shall do it badly.”

“Naturally, to have even a fraud well done is so much to the good; and naturally, I am just the man to be induced to take a hand in a project by its being called a bad name. My dear young lady, you begin your pleading at the wrong end, and the wrong end of a pleading is as dangerous as the wrong end of a gun; and you slander both yourself and me, which is doubly heinous, because every one believes a man if he slanders himself, and because he can’t recover damages. Take my advice — it’s my business to give advice and I can’t afford to keep any in stock that is not good! — give yourself and your

doings the prettiest words you can think of; you and they probably deserve them; and if you don't, it is not wise to tell anybody. What is this affair which I understand you to say is one of such public service that any one must regard it as an honour to be concerned in it? Don't answer quickly; the very prettiest word is sometimes hard to find; in particular when the matter in hand does not suggest it!"

"Oh, the matter in hand suggests it beautifully; indeed, I was giving the thing a bad name only to show my wit. The public service, that any one must regard it as an honour to be concerned in, is to help my cousin Alan to win his election. I don't pretend to know anything about the government at Washington; I do not need to, do I? But it must be plain to any one that, however good it may be, the presence of a cousin of mine must make it better. Well! the only way that I can help is to buy help. I can't offer the money directly to Mr. Urrey or to any one in Alan's confidence; Alan would not let them accept it; I shall have to establish an agency of my own. I want to know how to do it: I want you to do it for me; I want it done to perfection; I want to win; I want to win in a walk!"

"I beg your pardon, but it is important that I should know: I have always found it important that I should know everything!—to how many people have you spoken of this?"

"But two people know of it; I myself and you. I have had too little experience of any kind to judge, but it has seemed to me that one of the ways to keep a

secret is not to part with it; the other ways don't matter. Of course I trust you, because I have to!"

"Yes, you have to trust me; but that is not the point. No one ought ever to determine to keep a secret, until he has satisfied himself that he will not mind too much its being found out. The only secrets that are good to keep are the ones which it is not bad to reveal. What are we to say when the honour we have done ourselves and the service we have done the public shall be discovered?"

"I see: count on everything you wish to conceal being discovered, and you will sometimes be agreeably disappointed; and when you are not disappointed you have your legend ready-made for emergencies."

"Just so."

"My legend is that I am fond now and then of backing horses, and in this case have taken the notion of backing a man. I have no objection to plain speech: let a canvass be as unclean as you please, it is no more unclean than the track. I am interested in stables and jockeys; I am interested in ballot-boxes and ward-heelers — whatever that may mean. I want to know what it means. I want to be in the procession, I want the excitement, I want the inside 'tips,' I want to see the 'fun.'"

She was amazing as she sat there in her hard self-possession and dainty youth: there was something almost like effrontery in her self-control. The impression of effrontery passed swiftly with the next words, in which her self-control was not perfect.

"I have no objection to even plainer speech to you; I don't want what I say repeated, but you have a right to

know where you stand. I have loved my cousin since I was a little girl. I have always wished that he should ask me to be his wife, and both my uncle and aunt wish it too. Quite apart from his knowledge, I greatly care to back him up in anything he wants to do. If he finds me out, I have nothing to regret, and nothing to say."

A quickening of interest held the lawyer silent for a moment when she had ceased.

"You look and speak like your mother, my dear, when I made my court to her a hundred years ago and she told me she had already met a better man."

"I had not known," said Isabel, simply; not without a perception that she held him by a bond not likely to break.

"I daresay not; I didn't go about publishing it after what she said to me: I don't remember that I ever spoke of it before."

And having paused decently to allow her, and himself, to take the full measure of this fact, he plunged at once into a discussion of the details of Isabel's projected fraud, and the books that covered the walls from floor to ceiling in their law-calf bindings with black and red labels, looked down in serried columns upon their interview, as upon many more in which men and women hid their heart's desire and heart's regret as they might their wounds and shames, and canvassed gravely, without conscious irony, their "business."

XIV

It had not entered into Isabel's calculations before visiting Thomas Peyton to take him into her confidence; the effect of having done so she found wholly comforting. Her speech had given her attachment to Alan a substantial life, an independent being amongst outer things; it constituted in a manner an understanding between her and him, simplified her position, somewhat as if by an irrevocable public ceremony. To be sure the ceremony was *ex parte*; the bond confined no one except herself; but mentally she took secret possession of Alan: he was her property; at least she was *his* property; and she thought of her relation to him with a new cheerfulness. There came upon her a blithe excitement, a sprightliness and gayety, that made Cecil and Mrs. Windet, Howard and Urrey, forget their uneasy scruples, and bring out the good words they gave her without a dim wonder whether they were true; and indeed the trenchant unflattering analysis to which she had subjected them had given place in her own mind to an indiscriminate rush of kindness. It made her good to be happy; her mirror told her that it made her also good to look at; and beauty made her still more good. It had cost her no struggle to acknowledge to herself that she wished to be her cousin's wife; she had not asked herself whether she could not

"do better," in particular if he declined to take her seriously; she had not even asked herself whether she should be happy with him: she was of the people who take their ends for granted; she was of the people who "know what they want" — which is to say, who want what they want without doubt, quibbling, or surmise, and reserve their undivided intelligence for a divination of ways and means, and excel, therefore, in providing themselves with things which prove to be in all senses surprise-packages. She had waited for him to seek her out so long as any present notion of so doing could plausibly be ascribed to him. She would have preferred to the end that he should seek her out rather than that she should be obliged to seek him; but she was not disposed to spend her life in pretty manners and discretion, or to stand unhelped and helpless when she was perfectly able to help herself. No man did so; why should a girl? Quite apart from the fact that she was conventionally a "good match," she would make him a good wife; not a pink-and-white perfection perhaps, not a drawing-room *objet de luxe*, but a second pair of hands and second brain directed by one will: a wife to be respected and beloved for benefits bestowed. She had the comfort of feeling that the people about her approved of her and of her choice; she had the comfort of knowing that she approved of herself and of her choice; for a time she had the comfort of being sure that whatever preoccupations Alan might have that prevented him from perceiving that she existed, none of those preoccupations was a woman. With preoccupations other than a woman she would take her chances.

She had good ground for her security. She wished to serve him; she had a right to know him for that purpose; she brought him under a minute scrutiny; he was the business of her day. She studied him systematically, as if he had been a foreign language; got his moods and tenses by heart; catalogued and listed his irregularities; knew him with scholarly exactitude and thoroughness. By her position in the house, by the part her agents took in his canvass and the reports they daily forwarded to her, she was able to follow him from point to point, hour by hour, through the day; without his feeling an atom of annoyance, without his suspecting that his privacy was invaded, she heard words that were not uttered for her ears, saw the minutiae of his life out-of-doors — had him in effect under a microscope. She could scarcely have known more about him if she had opened his correspondence. With it all he was almost dishearteningly free from things to discover; or would have been dishearteningly so, if she had really wished to discover anything which it would pain her to learn. He minded his business with the punctuality and exclusiveness of an ambitious man in a crisis in his affairs. From week's end to week's end there was hardly an hour spent away from Estcourt in which he was not scheduled after the manner of an athlete in training for a match. The exceptions were rare afternoons or mornings at odd times when he mounted a horse and set out alone, pointedly declining to suggest that any one accompany him, pointedly declining company when it was offered him; and these exceptions gave her no

distressful surmise. It was the most natural thing in the world that he should need an interval of silence and recollection from time to time in which to know what he had been talking about, in which to make sure that when he should speak again he should not be betrayed into saying something different (the ideal of public eloquence being to say the same thing always), in which to hear himself think after having for so many days heard himself talk without thinking. What changed her mind in regard to them was a chance word of Howard's, a comparison to the honour of some chance beauty he had seen. The chance beauty was as lovely as My Lady of the Showers, as the Madonna of the Mackintosh, who had captured Alan's obstinate eyes at five o'clock in the morning, *in* a bone-aching drizzle, *on* a desolate Kentucky shore.

Even in this there was nothing for a cautious mind to take alarm at. Isabel's mind was not cautious; it was practical. She had heard some rumour of Alan's zeal during the time of flood which had preceded her arrival; she had heard some echo of Urrey's gibes about his zeal having passed beyond the state line; she made a quick inference of resentment and hostility, that the Madonna of the Mackintosh was not unconnected with the zeal, and with the odd morning and afternoon rides; she determined at least to make sure. It did not occur to her that she had no right to be indignant; it did not occur to her that she had still less right to investigate; she was not concerned with rights; she was not concerned with law or morals, but with practice. Possession is nine

points of the law and ninety-nine of the sense of law; she was in possession; she fought on the defence, at least she felt as if she did. In the cynical passion of rectitude in which a wife might trace the steps of her husband, or rifle his strong box for evidence of his having forgotten that he is no longer his own man, Isabel followed Alan the next time he set out alone. Once he eluded her by the waterside: naturally, she could not follow close: the second time she saw him embark on the ferry for the Kentucky side. After that, when she knew beforehand that he was to ride, she anticipated him; she reached the Kentucky side before him; she sat on her horse and waited where she could see without being seen. Even then she would have discovered nothing to confirm her surmise, if she had not been sufficiently interested to be obstinate. The first time she followed him, she had for her pains simply a longish pleasant ride among the hills. The second time she was seemingly destined to the same luxury, except that the road which Alan chose did not vary from the one down which she had followed him before. She was careful to keep her distance the second time, having almost been caught the first by his wheeling suddenly at the end of his course and starting home on a gallop. She lost sight of him for a moment around a bend past the shoulder of a bit of wood; as she reached a point where she could see through the diminishing trees, she discovered him dismounted, leading his horse and walking, retracing his steps by the side of a young woman.

XV

ALAN's reasoned convictions in regard to the Madonna of the Mackintosh had undergone no marked change since the conversation with her in which he had summoned her to defend her practice of cutting the lives of her defenceless neighbours into a pattern that pleased herself rather than them, and in which he had found her defence "capital." He had not ceased to remind himself that he had no just ground to think her fairer, or purer, or wiser, than a hundred girls whose fairness, purity, and wisdom he had taken as a matter of course — as of mere "commercial quality"; he had not ceased, in a spirit of self-mockery, to call to mind the saws of Urrey. The change that first befell him was a return upon himself. He had come to ask himself by what right, if he must marry, he could claim a paragon for his companion. He had before then noted the fatuity of men he knew when they described the "sort of woman they wished to marry"; he had asked himself, in a rush of ironical common sense, what hidden virtue there could be in Gilbert or in John that they should expect to purchase supernatural virtue or charm in the market in which beyond all others a man pays with his person; he had not posed the same question in his own case, only because his own case, strictly speaking, did not exist. At present it existed,

and the question had been posed. When he had first discovered that if he were on the point of being fool enough to marry at all, he would invite Cecily — *because* seemingly he admired her! — to let him be a fool in her company, he had resolved not to see her again; and indeed, resolve apart, the likelihood of his seeing her again was small. He would have matters enough to occupy him, heaven knew. He did have matters enough to occupy him, and for a time he did not see her again; but a pre-occupation with her formed the substance of his day, the consistent element in it, the body of his consciousness in which his affairs existed as details and accidents. She took possession of him as a fixed idea; whenever he was not compelled to think of something else she offered herself to his reflections; when he banished her and deliberately chose to occupy himself with something else, she remained banished just so long as he vigilantly stood on guard against her return. He began to understand that a man may confess to a woman that he loves her as he may confess to an inquisitor anything, everything, that may be necessary to obtain a respite in the pressure of the thumb-screws or the boot. No one can claim that there is anything ingratiating in the fact of occupying a man's attention literally against his will; he ought to have hated her. Sometimes he assured himself that he did; at other times he assured himself that she was innocent at least, if not angelical, and he himself an ass: a judgment in which Urrey would, he knew, in all good fellowship, have perfectly confirmed him. In the end he found that riding in her neighbourhood was as

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simple a necessity, if he wished to keep himself in condition, as drinking when he was thirsty. Or, if you choose, there came a time when he was worn out with the division of his energies, and yielded pusillanimously, angrily, to a desire that he desired not to desire, and to a perception that, to be the man he wished, he must be some man other than himself. He fell to riding in the lanes and by-paths on the Kentucky side; for a while without meeting her; with the wish even not to meet her.

By what stages he came at last to change this wish he was not very careful to consider. He lumped them in a somewhat resentful theory that he was perhaps condemned to marry; that there lurked a passion in the world which he had heard of and thought of always as something fatal and hateful like an endemic or hereditary disease, and that it had at last laid hold upon him. He might have been born in a climate in which he would almost inevitably have been destined to malaria, or consumption; he might have inherited a predisposition to one of these; he had inherited instead a predisposition to a fixed idea, to a form of mania. That was not what a man said when he asked a woman to be his wife, but that was what he meant. If he had been examined by a physician and told that he was gravely ill, he would have felt that he was "hard hit," but would have made up his account with the disaster. He would take precisely the same course in regard to his insanity. As long as he had fancied he could shake it off, he had shaken with all his might; now that he had become satisfied he could not shake it off, he ac-

cepted it. What it would amount to he did not know. He was impatient only to see the end of it. He began to ride in Cecily's direction with more intention and more pertinacity, and even with a growing sense of wisdom and of peace. He had said little enough to her when he had met her in his earlier rides; he had exchanged a dozen words, excused himself and ridden on his way. The next time he met her he would tell her in whatever form of words custom demanded that he wished she had been in paradise before ever he had seen her, and that she would do him a favour if she would at once let him know the worst—which would be her acceptance of him; he would tell her in whatever form of words custom demanded, and with unimpeachable sincerity, that he loved her with all his hopes and all his heart, and found himself irresistibly impelled to believe of her more good than in his sober senses he had ever found it possible to believe of any one. If it was not common sense, it was common madness: he had no doubt his was the mood in which from the beginning of time women have been wooed and won.

The time which in the record of his resolution was officially the "next" was the day on which Isabel discovered him leading his horse and retracing his steps by Cecily's side. He had been riding rapidly when he caught sight of her; he had no thought of meeting her that afternoon in particular; but the registered vow acted on his muscles even more rapidly than on his recollection, and he reined in his horse, leaped from his saddle, and plunged into his preliminary speech with

her with a rapidity which almost deprived him of his breath.

"I beg your pardon for bouncing out of my saddle like that: no, I was not rehearsing for a private circus exhibition, nor even practising a suppleness supposed to be of use in politics. I had been rather hoping to meet you, to say the truth; you don't mind my saying that? I had ridden this way, as I have ridden this way a number of times of late, in the assurance that I must chance upon you again; I had promised myself that when I did I should ask you a favour. May I ask it?"

This was not hypocrisy, but formalism, which is manners.

"I don't know: I should say yes at once, if you had not taken so much trouble about it that you make me think you want it; if you didn't want it, I might grant it at once! You make me think the favour a very big one. To let any one ask a favour when you don't know what the favour is, seems oddly like making a promise before one knows what the promise is. If the favour is a little one, you may ask it; if it is not a little one, you must not ask it till I know what it is!"

They were both laughing. Some notion crossed Alan's mind that it was hardly decent for her to laugh, and that it was particularly plucky in him; especially if she meant not to refuse him; especially if she meant to refuse him.

"No, the favour is not a little one, either for me to ask or for you to grant; but it would be a little one for me to ask of any one else, or for you to grant to any one else.

Come, a favour like that must have a certain charm. May I ask it?"

"I don't know."

"Do I?"

She looked at him as if she were taking his question seriously, and examining him to discover whether he bore proof on his face that he knew or did not.

"Perhaps you might take your chances. I do not like taking chances; I will have nothing to do with it; but I do not wish to interfere with you!"

"Very good, I take my chances: the favour is your permission that I may bring my mother to call on you. She would gladly come if she might know that her coming would not give you pain."

This was not sheer cowardice; it was opening the battle by a cannonade at long range; he had intended to open with a cannonade.

"It is true that that is a favour you might easily have asked of any one but me, and that I might easily have granted to any one but you. I am sorry: I cannot grant that: I warned you beforehand that you must not ask a big favour. You know as well as I could tell you that it is on my father's account that I speak; and not on account of Mrs. Windet."

"And on your own account?"

Cecily was startled; Cecily in an emergency was a formalist.

"My father's account *is* mine: it must be mine: for myself there can be nothing separate or different to be said."

"I ask you to let me bring my mother to visit you because, among other things, I wish, unless my doing so will give you pain, to pay Mr. Elderlin a visit on my own account. It is but a little while since I have met you, or even seen you, since we were bits of kids that should have played together; no one but you can be surprised that it has taken but a little while for me to believe of you all the good I can imagine. What I want is a chance that you should come to believe a little good — or rather a lot of good — about me; and I can't in the least expect that, so long as I can only bow to you twice a month in passing. I must press my request, please: you will let me bring my mother?"

"No," she said, "I would rather not."

"You will not forbid me to pay a visit to Mr. Elderlin."

"Papa would not like it, I am sure."

"At least you do not forbid it."

"What papa does not like, I do not like. I cannot forbid you to come: that would be ridiculous — would it not? But if you should come, you will be doing what I do not like: there can be nothing ridiculous in my saying that."

"I fancy that it is I that am ridiculous," said Alan.

She made no effort to break the force of her refusal. It was no small part of her charm for Alan that she always seemed to meet him with a kind of downright boyish honesty. He had taken his chances; he had got all that was coming to him: he liked what came to him less even than he had foreseen. But he praised Cecily.

Howard had said that for his own part he "liked them best when they kept him guessing": Alan did not like to be kept guessing; he liked to know where he stood.

It was with the accent of a perfect boyish honesty that she next spoke.

"I know nothing about who was in the wrong in the beginning; I daresay it may have been papa; but that can make no difference to me. All that can make any difference to me is that I belong to his side and that you do not. I suppose you know what I am talking about?"

"Yes, I know what you are talking about: I wish I did not!"

She walked on for a minute still busy with what she had still to say; she was "thinking it out." She was charming in her forgetfulness of him and of his passion, in her frank preoccupation with the words that she was next to say. He had never thought of it before: she must be six-and-twenty — how did it come that she had been allowed to remain unmarried? She might have been a hundred and twenty in the tranquillity with which she dealt with him. No woman under a hundred and twenty could be so free from coquetry.

"I do not need to know my side is right," she said at last; "I need only to know that it is mine. There is no reason whatsoever I could give my father for going behind that."

XVI

IF Isabel had entertained any scruples about following her cousin, the discovery she had made would have deprived her of them. This is not logic, it is psychology, which has much more to do with the case. The fact that her sudden surmise had been verified put her, to her own mind, in the right in testing it. A blind feeling of outrage dominated her as she turned away her horse. She had taken possession of Alan without his consent, to be sure, but at a time when, to all outward seeming at least, he belonged to no one else. He had no right to masquerade in an appearance of freedom when he was making clandestine visits across the river. He had no right to go against the sense and expectations of the people who knew him best and cared most for him. He had no right to go against his own plain interest — if only he had the wit to see his own plain interest! If he had not, she had. If he had not the wit to see what was good for him, and the resolution to follow it, she would see it for him, and make him follow it. She never for a moment doubted of her success. The sense of outrage had not shattered her; it had hardened her; it had “pulled her together”; it had shown her that she might count on herself, that under a sudden shock she neither “gave” nor broke. She had been struck heavily, and

had been neither jostled nor hurt; she stood more firmly on her feet than she had had reason to expect; she was insulted, she was angry, but also she was elated. How she was to succeed, she did not for the moment clearly know. Two or three points she saw at once, but for the present there was little use she could make of them. She knew well enough who the Madonna of the Mackintosh was; she knew well enough that the girl would not be meeting Alan "clandestinely" if she were not aware that she was acting in defiance of Charles Elderlin's will, or at all events of his supposed will. She was certainly afraid of him; something surely, at a pinch, could be made of that! Alan would not be meeting her clandestinely if he were not pledged to her, or at the least quite ready to be pledged to her; but Alan's position, too, was indefensible enough. He was already on terms of covert misunderstanding with Cecil; he was standing on the sky-line before the public — on a platform, making salaams and uttering bunkum, so many words a minute; he had better be hanged than risk a family quarrel at such a time — a quarrel in which Cecil would be little enough inclined to hold his hand, feeling as he did that the *Chronicle* was damnation published daily, and that its owner was little better than the local vicegerent of the archfiend. Any kind of shake-up (Isabel possessed more vocabularies than one) must turn to her advantage; matters as they stood were as bad as possible; the worst that could happen from a shake-up would be that every one should know what she knew, and that every one's knowing it should not change it; and there was a pos-

sibility, a bare possibility, but the very best she had to count on, that everybody's knowing might change it wholly to her advantage. At all events, Alan was concealing his hand for purposes that were not her purpose; she would force him to show it.

Thus far in her reflections she swept in a passionate lucidity before she had left Alan and Cecily half a mile behind. And here for some days she came to a halt. It was much easier to determine on making Alan show his hand than to accomplish her determination. She might, of course, go straight to Mr. Elderlin, tell him with perfect frankness who she was, her interest in Alan, and her interest, therefore, in him, Mr. Elderlin, and in his obvious wishes for Cecily. There was a resolute openness about this notion that captivated her fancy for a time. She decided to use it—in the last resort. She went the length at once of composing the speech that she would make to him, of devising the manner in which she would secure her introduction to his presence, of selecting the tones and gestures that would best serve her turn. She had been rehearsing them for days in her own sitting room, before a mirror,—if a thing was to be done, she neglected nothing that could secure its being done properly,—when the suggestion of an alternative was given her by Alan himself.

XVII

A FEW days after Isabel's ride of discovery there had been a house-party gathered at Estcourt: Mrs. Denslow, who was a daughter of the late Peyton Van Arsdale and the wife of Bodwell Denslow, and who on both accounts felt her claim to consideration to be extreme, and wore the Denslow rubies on great occasions with a complacent sense that she had done the whole duty of woman, which was sweetly to refrain from doing anything whatever, and that a woman the outside of whose head was from time to time so richly decorated would commit an artistic misdemeanour if she decorated the inside also, words of striking wit or perception tending to detract attention from tiaras; Miss Denslow, who wished she was a blonde because her mamma preferred blondes, and wished she had a sister to help to fill the huge vacuity of her mamma's days, and was passionately afraid to be out of her mamma's sight lest her mamma should discover some one else to fill the vacuity with something more like completeness, she herself being told sweetly and privately morning and evening that she left great tracts on all sides of her aching and unoccupied; Mrs. Guy Wedderburne and her aunt Mrs. Archdale, both of whom had just been to Alaska because they had already been to Norway and to Japan, and because there could

be no time when they would miss less by an absence than during the months immediately following Guy Wedderburne's decease; Mrs. Payne-Outram, who could not go to Alaska because she had just been to a conference of United Charities in Chicago, and was on her way to a conference of Women's Clubs to be held in Newport; Miss Tenney, who was a great reader because she skimmed the "Last Thing Out," and Miss Lippitt, who was a great flirt because she could utter a multitude of nothings with vivacity—both of whom played golf because golf-skirts were becoming to them and because the open air is good for the complexion; Bishop Clery, who had just returned from the antipodes, where he had established a number of missionaries who would get themselves massacred by the natives and make way for the mixed-drink and the bayonet which are the beginnings of civilization; Gilbert Bice, who also had just returned from the antipodes, where he had been providing himself with reminiscences; Harmon Cowles, who had not been to the antipodes, having found it infinitely more profitable to stay at home and possess himself of franchises: these, and a half-dozen others, among them Francis Brigantine, and Nannie his daughter.

Francis Brigantine was a lithe, well-knit man with a close-cropped mustache, gray predatory eyes, a hawk nose, and a manner of acquired lassitude. He had accepted a pose; he bodied forth an idea of himself with the severe consistency of a man who has a conception of style; he moved and spoke with a tired deliberation that suggested footlights and a practicable landscape. He was

decidedly a "good-fellow" and not a bit of a fool; his manner was merely a shell within which he concealed an astonishment at the way the world is made; and being puzzled himself, he puzzled other people. He was called a cosmopolite, which means that he had been born in one nation and had married and lived in another, and possessed neither the loyalties nor the instinctive knowledge and common sense of either, but instead the prejudices of both. At the end of his college course he had gone to Paris to finish an education which had been rather brilliantly begun; he had chosen to remain there to pursue, in circumstances more "stimulating" than any he could find at home, the career of a critic of the fine arts; and had ended by becoming what Urrey privately pronounced a modish tongue-tied connoisseur. He had become expert in diminutive passions and in the aspects of things to which diminutive passions attach themselves; he had cut himself off from everything in which passions not diminutive take root; he had exiled his imagination and intelligence when he had supposed himself to be exiling only his body. He had deliberately dedicated himself to exquisite emotions; he had deliberately drawn away from everything that was rude and violent: rudeness and violence hurt him: they were the "bloody-bones" of existence; he was, by temperament and conviction, "civilized." Masterpieces, to be sure, are not made by men who draw away from everything that is rude and violent, and are not to be understood by men whom rudeness and violence hurt: he had considered them as imperial bibelots, and had discovered

that he had nothing much to say of them worth saying. When he was alone, he passed the hours for the most part in a busy listlessness or in a vague wistful speculation, a fixed surprise that he had counted for so little, that there was so little for which it was worth while for any man to count. When he was in company, he guarded himself scrupulously against attracting an attention, or assuming an authority, which would be ridiculous in a man who had achieved nothing; he avoided with a studied care a conspicuous failure or conspicuous success in small accomplishments, and allowed men of half his powers to take the lead in little matters because he himself led no one in great matters. He was best content with himself perhaps when some one, any one, asked a favour of him. There were few people whom he did not regard with a half-bitter kindness, and few for whom he would not go a long way about to do a service. Mankind were all in a bad boat together, he felt; and the most helpless, and most in need of help, were those who still thought one thing greatly more important than another; and he gave such help as lay beneath his hand with an unwearying patience and good-will. It seemed to him the most pathetic thing in the world that any one should want anything very much: what one wanted amounted to so little when one got it.

Nannie he habitually looked upon as the most unfortunate young woman in the world; partly because she wanted with an extreme vivacity what she wanted at all; and partly because she had him for a father.

She was neither shy nor timid, and he did not think her so; but she was a neatly finished brunette, who had always looked smaller than she was, like an object in miniature, and she said "yes, papa," and "no, papa," and gave rapid glances beneath long, shy eyelashes, out of quickly lifted, frightened eyes, and let her wishes be known in breathless little half-sentences. Brigantine knew in an indolent way that breathless little half-sentences, and quick glances, beneath long, shy eyelashes, out of frightened eyes, were perfectly compatible with a passionate intensity and tenacity of purpose; he had learned this from Nannie's mamma, who had died in childbirth, and who had been like Nannie a brunette finished with an extravagant neatness of detail like an object in miniature. When Nannie had suggested that the convent was a prison-house, that the very air was inert and penitential behind the iron gate and the convent walls, he had understood and sympathized; when the pallid, placid sister superior, whose composure, he had reflected, was got up regardless of expense, explained parentally, between guardians, that Nannie was *bonne and sage* but just the veriest trifle heady and vivacious — the least in the world *emportée* — he had understood and sympathized. It had seemed to him obvious that the air must be inert and penitential behind the convent walls; it was inert and penitential beneath the open sky, heavy with the delicate dust of dead creeds and outworn enthusiasms; it had seemed to him obvious that a little girl was a little goose to be *emportée*, in particular in a matter of such small concern as exchang-

ing the defunct air behind the convent walls for the defunct air outside the convent walls; but he was not disposed to give a little goose pain. When Nannie between two swift glances expressed the wish to be taken to Algiers, to Italy, to be taken vaguely "everywhere," he had taken her vaguely everywhere; when she had wished to play with colour-tubes and a palette, and even to have her pastime taken seriously, he had given her such masters as she needed, and had taken her pastime more seriously than she could imagine. He was helpless in the presence of a strong desire; if any one cared so much that his pulses quickened with eagerness or suspense, who was a man, whose pulses dwindled, to stand in his way? He "chaffed" Nannie about the silken leading strings in which she held him, and the grand passions and ambitions in the service of which she pulled him this way and that; her government, he told her, was an absolute tyranny tempered by shy eyes and glances; when she needed him she recollected with a pang that she had forgotten to kiss him since she kissed him last; she bestowed a caress upon him now and then reflectively and solemnly as a sovereign bestows a ribbon or a star for faithful service; she bestowed a minute's attention upon him now and then, when she had the leisure, as a careful railway company inspects its rolling-stock at the big shops; she had discovered the art of perpetual emotion and six enthusiasms to the minute; she swept him along so rapidly in the pursuit of her grand passions and ambitions he had no time to discover any of his own; he led the life of a philos-

opher harnessed to a "hurry-up" comet badly needed somewhere in space where it was not; she lived in psychic tropics; she breakfasted at a hundred and twenty degrees in the shade, and took her morning walk in a typhoon, and chose a hat or fixed a hat-pin in a more fervid burst of sensibility than goes commonly to win a battle or to sack a town. He "chaffed" her gayly, and his face with its eternal effortless tranquillity and effortless fatigue became not more than half lifeless as he laughed at her; though he felt a thousand years old in the presence of her tingling pulses, and his gayety ended in a dull pain.

His present visit to the States was one of a number which he had found necessary, from time to time, in order to reestablish his affairs. It seemed to him on the whole the most lamentable circumstance of life, that affairs once established should be subject, like houses or clothes, to fall into disrepair; and he listened to the statements of his attorneys with an incurious melancholy. Statements of attorneys and men of business generally were superfluous, rather disheartening functions, that custom would do well to eliminate; his attorneys must know better than he how to conduct his affairs, as his cook must know better than he how to make an omelet; he as little wished to assist in the preparation of documents as in the breaking of eggs. Business apart, he maintained a certain number of social relations; in a measure because he was tenacious of friendships once formed — a man or woman with whom one had been on terms of intimacy was a substantial portion of one's life and one's world, and one's world was at best too fragmentary and eclectic; and in a

measure because the sense of isolation was growing upon him as time passed, — invading him with an almost physical cold. In the present instance in particular, he had made a point of seeing every one to whom he was at all attached and who might be supposed to be at all attached to him. It was Nannie's first visit to America, and he wished vaguely, with the half-jesting, half-poignant pity which a man, himself astray in his world, feels for any one dependent upon him, to claim for her the protection of his friends. He had no salient intention of finding her a husband; she had announced with a smaller accompaniment of the manner of shyness than usual, that she chose not to marry; and though he understood that a preference for maidenhood is credible only in a woman who has married, and married disastrously, he was not disposed to force her hand; he did not want to part with her: he simply needed companions himself, and therefore wished to provide them for her — who, by the way, did not need them. He had come to Estcourt because he always came to Estcourt: he had known Cecil when they were irreverent striplings, audaciously delighting in the certainty that in a score of years the world would lie between the hands of their generation, and had sided with him strongly in his break with Elderlin; it comforted both of them to come together at intervals and to tell each other how little they and their generation knew what to do with the world now that they had got it between their hands. He had known Mrs. Windet when she was radiantly content with herself and all her world, and when he himself had been content; they had both

ceased to be content of late years, but agreed each time they met that two discontents together are less than either taken separately: they found each other good company.

Alan had not been at Estcourt during the early days of the Brigantines' visit; it was the beginning of October, and as became a great man — "even a little one," Mrs. Windet said, — he was much occupied. He first put in his appearance one morning for a day's coaching, when he climbed on the box beside Nannie, for whose happiness in handling the reins the rest of the party were to risk their necks. There had been an unexpected frost which had left a touch of sharpness in the full sunshine; the air was "extra dry," and went to the heads and heels of the four smart bays like champagne, and the leaves died gallantly in a splendour of scarlet and gold. Brigantine, who had seated himself next to Isabel, mystified her by a gentleness and a simplicity that had an undertone of grave, ambiguous irony. He seemed to like her very much, in his listless, kindly, detached way, and to wish her to like him, though he was laughing at some one, possibly at himself, possibly at every one, — possibly even at her. He chatted of a host of people they knew in common, with a word for each that made a picture: he chatted of his visits to his schoolmates and kinsmen, and of their scarcely concealed sympathy for him because he had had the misfortune not to recognize, in the fact that he had been born in a hemisphere but little to his taste, a reason for remaining there; they took for granted, with a certain engaging exaggeration and brightness of faith, an interest on his part, in what was titularly his native land,

as inextinguishable as their own ; they constituted themselves the official showmen of the continent, took it under their protection, — “ladled it out to him,” — bespoke indulgence for its juvenility in an accent of human tenderness, patronized its magnitude as a substantial element in the dignity of space, set off its natural advantages and “points” with an ingenuous insensibility to the implication that its natural advantages and points could not safely be left to catch the attention themselves, dispensed perpetual alacrity and six engagements a day as the last achievement of luxury in a portion of the globe in which it is the supreme distinction of things that they do not stand still. Isabel despised him really. In her austere young sense of efficiency she discovered no portion in the world but shame and scorn for a man who could not do things or who did not care to try. Besides, though she listened and replied becomingly, her attention was scarcely more occupied with him than with the leap and swing of the tally-ho on its springs, the crunch of the firm ground beneath the wheels, the low ring of the traces and coupling-reins. She had seated herself, inadvertently she would have said, so that she could see the occupants of the box. Nannie held her hands too high and in rounding a corner used a double-loop, Isabel inwardly commented ; Nannie had learned in a bad school, but, such as it was, she had caught its style and practised it with a deftness and correctness that accentuated and embellished it.

Isabel’s eyes strayed again and again toward Nannie and Alan and rested on them. Nannie’s manner of

shyness had given place to a little-girl exhilaration in the brisk play of the iron-shod feet on the road that spun beneath them like a broad white band on a whirling globe. Even in repose she was of the lustrous brunette type; for the time being, in her elation with the motion and the sun, as Isabel could see when she caught sight of Nannie's side-face in glimpses, she was radiant. Alan had been astonished into a sudden unmeasured admiration; his pleasure in her freshness and beauty was as undisguised as if she had been some new wonderful kind of orchid. Alan's manner toward the woman before him, whoever she might be, was at all times one of an exclusive interest in her, and in her lightest intonation, word, and gesture, that might be taken to imply any degree of devotion or esteem: he had no second-best manner; he was like a woman who should always go clad in a ball-dress because she had no other; he spoke the dialect only of the special cases of regard, and in other cases laid himself open to be misunderstood. Isabel herself had a dozen times been made uncertain, when he had been talking with her, whether he meant something in particular or was scarcely more conscious of her than if he had been practising behaviour in an empty room; she had satisfied herself by observing that his manner toward every woman — even toward his mother! — was precisely the same. He was always conscientiously rendering his lines, playing his appointed part, the part of the abstract chivalrous male in the presence of the abstract female; the particular woman before him made no more difference to him, Isabel reflected

cynically, than the particular nickel makes to a "slot-machine": chivalry, or gallantry, or whatever one chose to call it, was precisely that abstract indifference to the women before one, that abstract readiness to take them as they came and be as nice to one as to the other. Isabel wondered, as she watched him, whether Nannie too must not be uncertain whether he meant something in particular; or rather she wondered whether it was possible Nannie should not be quite sure that he did mean, or at least feel and express, something very particular indeed. While she was occupied in clearing the edges of this notion, bringing it out in sharp relief, she had inadvertently let her gaze rest on the couple on the box with a fixity that had attracted Brigantine's attention; she had perceived that before she turned aside her eyes. Her first impulse was to take up the conversation where he had dropped it an instant before; on reflection she caught his glance with a full look of intelligence.

"Nannie is extremely good to look at," she said, smiling.

"Happiness is good for the looks," he said; "she is amusing herself hugely." There was a pleasure in his face because she was amusing herself.

"So is my cousin Alan," said Isabel, with intention.

Isabel was good at games of chance and skill in which a man who reflects must reflect quickly, and in which a man who acts must act at once and take big chances. She had had but a mystic second-impulse, an oracular hint, to go upon, when she deliberately caught Brigantine's glance and smiled in his face; ten minutes later

she had a definite design, but one which she stood ready at any moment to alter or abandon, as circumstances might suggest, and one which she understood could be of little service to her, apart from luck. As a matter of fact she did count on luck; she habitually counted on luck; luck commonly came to the help of the people who counted on it; luck came to all people, but those only who had counted on it could take advantage of it when it came. She talked with Brigantine with a new animation; she even forgot that she despised him; for the time being she despised him as little as she would a pawn on a chess-board, in a position in which that pawn might win or lose the game. If he wished her to like him, he should feel that he had succeeded in his wish: he should find himself discreetly flattered, discreetly referred to, discreetly taken into account, discreetly made much of; she would—there was nothing she would not do to make him pliant in her hands, and to make Nannie pliant; there was nothing she would not do to make them stay on at Estcourt, all the winter if need be; there was nothing she would not do to make them see—them and every one else!—that Alan was paying court to Nannie; at least every one should think he saw; every one should surmise, and expect, and half-hint, and suggest, and discover one another's surmises, expectations, half-hints, suggestions, till every one should be sure in a fortnight's time that some one else at least had seen.

"I was just saying to Mr. Brigantine," said Isabel, turning to Mrs. Archdale, "what a charming colour

Nannie has to-day ; I can't keep my eyes away from her. Neither, I fancy, can my cousin, the misogynist."

"Your cousin's misogyny is a pose: it is simply his way of dissembling his admiration. Physicians wrap their bitters in sugar; Mr. Windet wraps his sugars in bitter. Also," said Mrs. Archdale, "Nannie is not the only one who has a charming colour, or a charming hat; you look as if you had just been sent home from the milliner's, and as if the milliner had been inspired."

"You must not say that to Alan — that his misogyny is a pose, I mean; you may say all the nice things imaginable to him about my colour and my hat. His misogyny he wishes to be taken with an awful gravity."

"Yes, I know: he regards it as a part of his opera-bouffe politics; his statesmanship would not be serious, if he were not a misogynist!"

"My dear Mrs. Archdale," said Howard, "from that strong accent of condemnation I'm sure you must be talking about me; besides, I caught something about opera-bouffe politics and misogyny, and — and I recognize the picture. I wish you would not tell the truth about me while I am talking to Miss Tenney; the truth invariably embarrasses me."

"We were not talking of you at all," said Mrs. Archdale; "we were talking of Miss Windet's hat; we were saying how opera-bouffe a serious interest in politics becomes in the presence of a question of millinery, and that before a really grave achievement in ribbons, feathers, chiffon, and felt, misogyny is impossible except as a pose."

“Yes,” said Isabel across to Mildred Tenney, “except that the hat we were thinking of was Nannie’s, not mine; and the pose was Alan’s, not Mr. Lidcott’s. Look at Nannie — she is too pretty to miss!”

XVIII

THREE days later, the luck for which Isabel was waiting to second her came more quickly than she expected, and in a way of which she knew little at the time. There was that afternoon in the grounds of the country club a game of polo, which every one enjoyed hugely because man is a contentious animal and the games which stir his pulses are mimic war. The battle done, the non-combatants scattered in groups, in the heart of one of which Alan found Nannie, very foreign, very alert and perceptive, very glad to be alive in a world that contains a multitude of things with colours on them.

"I have something of the last importance to speak to you about," he said; "I am glad to have Mrs. Wedderburne and his Reverence the Bishop here as witnesses: you have not yet promised me a dance for this evening."

The Bishop recognized the appropriateness of calling the church in his person as a witness, and Mrs. Wedderburne was not piqued that the petition for a dance had not been directed to her; in the first place, because she was not dancing, and in the second place because she was dead to all worldly interests, which meant all interest in Richard Hollis, whom she married two years afterward.

"What is the business of the last importance?" asked Nannie; "I will take that first."

"*That* is the business of the last importance."

"I said I would give you a dance if you won the game."

"I know: I played badly; therefore give me two dances out of charity to the vanquished."

"The young barbarian speaks by the book," said the Bishop, seconding him; "the church sanctions his petition."

Mrs. Wedderburne remembered vaguely a time a thousand years ago when she herself had taken part in such trivialities. Mrs. Wedderburne was aged twenty-four. Bishop Clery, who was twoscore years her senior, was not obliged to make so long a retrospect.

"I will give you one dance," said Nannie, "if you will beg Isabel to take me to the Beeches."

The Beeches was a point of vantage in the grounds of Estcourt sufficiently far from the house to make a companion desirable. Nannie, with the enthusiasm of an amateur, had discovered some wonder in the afternoon light filtered through the leaves: she professed a passion for effects and tones; she had got an "impression" which she was anxious to deepen before the autumn should blast her "subject" past recognition. Alan begged Isabel promptly; she laughed archly, and told him to start without her; she would be occupied for a minute with Mrs. Denslow—some one was always occupied a minute with Mrs. Denslow; if they went through the links, she would join them at the stile in the hedge at Red Rocks.

Nannie had not thought of Alan's accompanying her, even as an escort for her and Isabel. She set out with

him because she saw that no objection on her part was expected, either by Alan or by any one else. She was puzzled by the liberty allowed to girls in America; she would instinctively have refused to start until Isabel was disengaged; she could not forget her convent training even in circumstances in which she knew it was at fault. But she was too shy to raise a point that was plainly outside the tradition of the company in which she found herself; and when she and Alan had once set out—when they were at last alone in the fields—she lost her fear of open space, she picked her way in the short crisp grass with a sense of adventure. She was exhilarated by the unaccustomed companionship as by a draught of heady wine. She had not been the last to perceive that Alan was “attentive” to her; and she found him none the less charming for that. She thought him indeed very much in love with her—as much in love as it was decently possible for a man to be who had known her for so short a time. The notion had already occurred to her that soon or late she would receive from him a proposal in form, and the notion had not stricken her with alarm. What did strike her with alarm, there, suddenly, in the golf-links, in the midst of her gayety, was the notion of what she might say to him in return. The notion came to her while they were waiting for Isabel at the stile in the hedge at Red Rocks. It took complete possession of her when Isabel failed to join them, and they walked on without her, climbing the rugged ground to the Beeches. There was nothing in

Alan's tone for the time being to suggest that she would be called upon to frame her reply soon; he was chatting with her lightly, abundantly, about the most impersonal matters in the world; but the longer he delayed his demand for a reply, the more certain she would be, it seemed to her, to give him the reply she hated. She would give her consent against her judgment; she would be won against her will. When she had chosen her seat on the knoll that was called the Beeches, he ceased to talk at all, out of deference, she supposed, to her fancied preoccupation with the afternoon light filtering through the autumn leaves. She was not occupied with the afternoon light; she was a prey to an illimitable panic. It was fortunate he did not speak to her; she could not have spoken a word in return. She wanted to take to her heels, and because she wanted to take to her heels, she sat quite still, transfixed with pain, till the failing light warned her that she would be expected at Estcourt. She had noted the warning of the failing light too late; in the haste of the return there was small opportunity for speech, except when Alan guided her by voice as well as hand across the broken ground. The way was longer than she had supposed; in the silence and the dusk she fancied a growing tension, a vibration, bringing the far-off peril moment after moment incalculably nearer; she quickened her steps desperately, and came to Estcourt almost at a run.

Isabel explained afterwards in a burst of convincing grief and frankness that she had not thought they

would either of them greatly mind her failure to join them: she had been sure that Alan would not. Their absence would not perhaps have been noticed if any one but Isabel had known that she was to accompany them, or if they had not been late to dinner, or if when they returned Nannie had not excused herself from coming to dinner at all and from going to the ball afterward. Even in the circumstances, comment did not go beyond what is perhaps an indispensable expression of police-power so long as society wants what it wants and is to be kept what it is. Mrs. Denslow raised her languid eyebrows; Mrs. Denslow had elaborated the art of life, including the art of expression, along the line of least resistance, and never used a word where a gesture or a grimace would serve. By so doing she gained immensely in what art critics call universality and significance: a word could mean at the utmost but two or three things, the meaning of a gesture or a grimace was infinite. Mrs. Archdale said wittily to Howard Lidcott, to whom she had taken a fancy, that she was proud of her native land: she had long known that all the world was becoming penetrated with American ideas; she had had no notion that the point of them had pierced the walls of the French convent. Mrs. Payne-Outram, who conceived mankind as divided into two hostile camps, and saw all things in sex as Malebranche saw all things in God, took as was but proper a higher ground, and was confidentially displeased, in the hearing of Mrs. Wedderburne, that Alan should have been

indiscreet. In the hearing of all persons else she was unconscious to the point of diplomacy. Miss Tenney, Miss Lippitt, and the unmarried ladies generally, withheld all expression of opinion; it being sternly understood that the police-power is vested in matrons and men, and that personal opinions are unfeminine in virgins, except in regard to matters of formal religious faith, which, in gravity be it said, may well occupy all the fervour of belief that they possess. The men, with the exception of Cecil and of Brigantine, agreed briefly and sardonically that Windet had got all that was coming to him, by which occult phrase they meant that he had asked Nannie to marry him and had been "thrown down." They agreed also as they watched him at dinner and afterward that he could take "punishment." Cecil and Mrs. Windet emulated Mrs. Payne-Outram's official unconsciousness. Brigantine chose a convenient season to knock at Nannie's door, and was admitted, even more than commonly impressed with his sense of the pathos and the ridicule of a man who has lost his way in the world. That he of all people should be the counsellor and guide of some one else — and that some one a girl!

Nannie dealt with the situation with a neat mastery and sufficiency that Brigantine associated with the definiteness of her profile. She had become without the inconvenience of a transition a woman: he recognized the accent.

"I was hoping you would come," she said: "no, I haven't a headache. Papa, I want to go away from

here; I want you to take me back to Paris; I want to go to-morrow."

"And that's a dear rational little speech, Nan," he said, slipping an arm about her and leading her to a seat; "having made me jump with it, perhaps you had better tell me what it is all about. We are due to stay here a week yet; we are due to stay at other places for two months yet: we can of course plan an evasion, but there must be a reason for that."

"Then plan the evasion."

"There is a reason, no doubt?"

"There are a dozen reasons."

"Ah, a dozen is too many. There never existed a dozen reasons for anything. What is one?"

"One reason?"

"Yes; one reason."

Nannie hesitated helplessly.

"I don't know!"

"Does any one know? Come, Nan, dear; you can't behave as if your speech were still in pinafores: something has happened to alarm or trouble you? I don't ask what it is."

"No, no; nothing has happened: there is nothing to alarm or trouble me."

"*Eh bien* then?"

She had dropped her eyes during the last few seconds; she had lost her grown-up accent; she had become a little girl again. As he stood before her, not unkindly insisting, she gave one swift upward glance, and burst into a passion of tears.

XIX

THE next morning the serious business of life occupied Estcourt. Cowles and Alan went to the stables to look at a horse; Bice and Howard to Bice's room to look at a rifle. To be sure, none of these gentlemen knew as much about a horse or a gun as an ordinarily intelligent jockey or gunsmith's apprentice; but it consoled them to exercise their judgment. Horses and guns are interesting things, and it is pleasant to look at them and name them; and the talk of the four turned on "action," "raw" horses and horses not "raw," the advantage of hot stables or cold stables, of water standing in the stalls for horses likely to "go roarers," of the effect of cold on smokeless powder, of grooved straight-shells and patched straight-shells. The ladies had different frocks to put on, and frocks too are interesting things to look at and name, as important and dangerous in their way as horses likely to "go roarers," and as patched straight-shells. Mrs. Payne-Outram had letters to dictate, without which it is conceivable Providence might have accomplished its ends,—might have "worried along," Brigantine said; but the wisdom of her occupying herself with them was manifest; they kept her from dictating others. Mrs. Denslow talked of the ball and compared it to other balls, and mentioned who wore

what and who danced with whom. Miss Denslow had been present at the ball, and knew perfectly who wore what and who danced with whom, and had heard about the other balls time out of mind; but in any case Mrs. Denslow would have insisted on making her remarks to some one, and there could be no one else whom she would pay so largely as her daughter for the service of listening. Mrs. Archdale made epigrams, some of which Mrs. Wedderburne had not heard before. The Bishop bothered his head about a matter of administration, a jealousy between two of his subordinates, both of whom had sent him "documents" and "correspondence," in which each proved to demonstration that the other was things unmentionable to polite ears. In the end he wrote two curt letters, which he did not send to post, and went before breakfast for a stroll in the placid woods, where he found Mrs. Windet seated on a rustic bench. Mrs. Windet's notion of being a perfect hostess was to be happy in her own way from dawn to dinner, and to permit her guests to be happy in their own way, if they could. The sayings uttered by Mrs. Windet and the Bishop on the rustic bench were not, perhaps, notable; but when the Bishop returned to the house, he rewrote the two curt letters.

Somewhat early in the morning Brigantine asked Cecil for a half-hour's speech in private. Brigantine was a man about whom everything was specifically drooping — "wilted," we Americans say — from his half-closed eyelids and his mustache to the language and gestures in which he chose to express himself. His

æsthetic weariness had invaded his body and its trappings and had modelled them into a perfectly fitting garment. Nothing about him suggested infirmity; he was not feeble, he was only resting, resting by anticipation, from a fatigue in the future, which a massive, self-respecting, imposing indolence from day to day postponed. He sat in his chair with a universal lassitude, which was the symbol and essence of all possible lassitudes, and smoked delicately and dropped his words negligently one by one as if conversation were a state function in which celerity would be an indecorum; perhaps because celerity might suggest that something else was by comparison important enough to hasten forward to. Cecil sat erect and grave, "like a flag-staff with the flag at half-mast," Brigantine thought.

"Cecil, I have received some tiresome letters this morning that oblige me to cut short my stay here," Brigantine began, speaking with a slowness that should have been a drawl and was not; "indeed I may be compelled to take ship sooner than I had fancied; I must leave this evening for New York. Just a minute, please, before you go into your regrets as a host at losing me, and your condolence with me for my ill-luck; the statement I have just made about my letters and all that is officially correct; but like so many statements officially correct, as a man of your administrative talent will understand, it is but partly true. I have received this morning no tiresome letters whatever."

Brigantine paused, not as if he had reached a conclusion, but as if a long speech must naturally fatigue

both the man who delivers it and the man who listens, making it at once courteous and hygienic to take a rest between sentences.

"I don't think I understand," said Cecil.

"That's just the beauty of it; no more do I," said Brigantine.

"I mean I don't understand what you are talking about."

"That's what I mean too," said Brigantine; "I haven't the least idea; I have come to you to find out. As a foreigner, you know, I am naturally at a loss."

"As a cosmopolite, who is neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring, nor anything that is good, but only a non-descript somewhat not even definitely detestable, you are naturally puzzling. That is to say, I believe you did receive tiresome letters, and I don't believe you are going away; we should miss you too much. Francis, I'm busy; of course you do not know what that means. You want to say something to me; what is it?"

"I came to question you on a matter of national custom. Perhaps it would give me a start if you can tell me whether Alan has had it in mind to ask Nan to be his wife?"

Cecil Windet stared.

"I haven't the least idea," he said, beginning to understand that the languid gentleman in front of him was in earnest and that the matter was grave. Cecil himself never allowed any one an instant's doubt when he himself was in earnest, and the respect that he felt for people who did leave an instant's doubt was a subordinate kind of respect; but a grave matter must be treated gravely.

"That's just what Nan said. Or rather I questioned her as to what had come to pass upon her walk with Alan, and she said she did not know. When I pressed her further, she thought it useful to have hysterics, and (I beg your pardon) to ask to be taken away. The position of the elder generation in the land of the free, strikes me as pathetic; as only less pathetic than that of the younger generation."

"Good God," said Cecil, the matter beginning to break upon him.

"Quite so," said Brigantine.

"I don't understand that it can be you who owe the apology," said Cecil, bitterly; "I am shocked that Nannie should have been distressed."

"There can hardly be a need of apology between us two, Cecil," said Brigantine, for the first time gravely. "Also we do not yet know what we are talking about, or whether we are talking about anything. That is the point of the pathos."

Cecil was passably impatient of the pathos.

"The directest way is the simplest," he said, moving toward an electric button; "I will send for Alan."

"Not at all: stop a bit: if a girl does not know whether a man has asked her to be his wife or not, I daresay the man does not know either: I daresay nobody knows; it seems wholly probable nobody does. At all events, I cannot at once remain here as a guest and question him. I repeat, the position of the elder generation is pathetic in a country in which two young people, in regard to neither of whom there can be a breath of sus-

pcion, may go hide in the bushes as long as suits them and return to dinner without finding it necessary to explain, except oracularly, by silence on the one side and hysterics on the other!"

Cecil's cheek flushed at Brigantine's sleepy brutality.

XX

IN no fraction of the little world which is called distinctively the great world, not satirically but because of the wisdom and beauty, dignity and valour, of the persons belonging to it, can pettiness and insignificance exist; little things are great when they concern great people, even diminutive great people, and great people are left at leisure to discuss them with the particularity which they deserve. While Brigantine was speaking with Cecil, Isabel had sought out Mrs. Windet, whom she found, scissors in hand, in a greenhouse, dedicating her morning hours to an impassioned contemplation of roses. The turn affairs had taken satisfied Isabel as deeply, for the time being, as if her success had been complete: it is the reward, and the punishment, of people who like to do things, to enjoy the process as much as the finished work. She had not yet heard that Brigantine was to leave Estcourt: she had heard only that he was closeted with Cecil. In the meantime she had thought it useful to extend her operations to her aunt; it is always useful when one is working by means of rumour to talk to as many people as possible. In her momentary gayety, she found it a pity that her aunt should be reduced for an amusement to contemplating roses when the human interests about her were so poignant.

"My dear Isabel," Mrs. Windet was saying, "I dare say you and every one may be right, but I do not greatly care — except in regard to you. And even you are not perfectly satisfactory: you do not give enough attention to vegetables; you are distressingly animal, Isabel; don't deny it, you could not have such ravishing gowns if you were not; and even you in all your glory are not clad as one of these."

"Mr. Lidcott told me last night that I was lilies and roses," said Isabel, reminiscently; "to be sure, that *may* have been only an extravagant compliment to my white dress; and may have meant only that I toil not neither do I spin. Besides, he laughed."

"Men never pay compliments, they only try to, the poor dears," said Mrs. Windet, clipping a tall nodding flower as she spoke, and then another and another, and laying them in a basket; "and they always laugh or smirk. They should deliver their compliments in an accent of matter-of-fact graveness and solemnity; there is nothing we would not believe if they said it with a businesslike sincerity."

"Yes, I know. Old William, when I was learning to drive tandem, used to receive my remarks about a light hand, and a slant driving-box, and the leader's going into his collar, with such deference that when a pony pecked and I landed on my head in the road, I never for an instant guessed that I had things still to learn. I supposed accidents like that must happen to every one."

"Isabel, you are unspeakably 'horsey.' To be sure, I like it: the way you talk impresses me as if you pos-

sessed the command of a strange language; and your off-hand mention of being stood on your head fills me with awe. Is there really much gossip? I ought, as a hostess, to pray that there is; nothing makes a success of a house-party like an incident."

"I dare say there is enough to satisfy your conscience as a hostess; but I shall not tell you any more about it: it would only distract your attention, Aunt Bettie, and mine, from vegetables: vegetables are much more satisfactory than men, or even than horses—I have it on the best authority."

"They are certainly more satisfactory than Alan. I had hoped he would lose his head about you, my dear; or rather, that he would come to his senses. I told him so, which was all *I* could do to further it. To be sure, there is a common impression that that is just the worst thing I could have done; but impressions like that are only pretexts to excuse people from trying to do anything. Do you think he is very much taken with Nannie?"

Isabel did not reply because a message came to Mrs. Windet that Cecil wished to speak with her. She said that she would see him in the greenhouse. Isabel took her leave, and Mrs. Windet still clipped roses, as if clipping roses were the most important function in the world; as indeed, with a few exceptions, she thought it was. She had come to be very placid in these last years; had died and gone to heaven, she phrased it; and watched the people about her, as she watched the lights and shadows as they passed, benignantly. Alan in

particular she watched benignantly and almost listlessly; there was no longer need to defend him or to counsel him: Alan had grown beyond her. She had filled her basket when Cecil arrived, and sat with it on her lap, looking up at him, vaguely wondering, as she had wondered before, whether she had done him injustice, vaguely wondering, as she had wondered before, whether he was really alive. Cecil was too busy a man for vague wondering; when he had once got an impression he seldom had time to revise it; he held the practice of revision a bad economy. But he took some precautions in the beginning that his impression should not be false. He did not tell her openly what he had in mind: the habit of keeping communication between them at a minimum forbade that.

"Brigantine has just told me that he must leave for New York to-night, and possibly for Paris by the next boat."

She waited an instant for him to continue.

"No bad news, I hope?"

"He spoke of some letters received this morning; he said nothing of what they contained."

Again she waited an instant for him to continue.

"He takes Nannie with him?"

"Naturally, if he thinks it likely he will be called suddenly abroad."

"I daresay Alan will miss her," she suggested, with a gleam of fun.

"That has occurred to you, too?" he asked, with no responding gleam.

"It has occurred to every one since last night, or rather it had occurred to every one before; every one has been radiantly happy, having something to talk about. I am passably tired of Alan."

"That is not the sort of thing which would be likely to come to your ears—gossip about Alan, I mean."

"One doesn't have to hear it to know that it is there. Besides, Isabel has told me. It comes to her ears. I'm broken-hearted about Isabel; she's a dear."

"Yes," assented Cecil, "everybody ought to marry everybody anybody wants him to, in the best possible of worlds. Does it strike you that Brigantine may have another reason than the receipt of letters for leaving to-day?"

"It strikes me the letters are conveniently *à propos*."

"It strikes me so, too. It would be better—would it not?—if you should see Brigantine and Nannie a bit. I came to tell you; I thought you would want to know."

The day had turned hot, as is to be expected in a wide barren land that is temperate mathematically only, in the sense that between alternate frost and flame the mean average of heat the year round is inviting. It was one of those rare autumn days that come upon one like a waif, a stray, from the main body of the summer; a full, almost pious, reminiscence of the August over-past. Men and women wore again the lightest, whitest linen or flannel, and haunted the billiard room and verandas, and played pool or poker, consoling themselves from time to time with glasses against the sides of which cracked ice

tinkled pleasantly. In the midst of a group in a summer-house Alan rallied Nannie with a cordiality that to the auditors seemed larger than life and much too natural, on her disloyalty in leaving them, and Nannie replied in finished little speeches that were Gallic and defensive. Mrs. Windet sat with Brigantine where the Bishop had found her in the early morning. Neither sun nor rain could keep her for many hours together in the house or near it; she could not forget that the house did not belong to her. Her domain lay under the open sky, and she inspected it conscientiously as if it would be sensitively aware of her neglect. She never wondered if lawns and trees were really alive.

"I am sorry you are going away; I shall miss you. There are not many people to whom I could say that. It is the saddest thing about growing old that people one would miss become few."

"Yes, and the people who would miss one become few; it is good to know that one would be missed; it is a kind of dying by inches, and not a good kind, to see the people who would miss one become few. And the things that would miss one, too, become few. After a certain time it becomes as difficult to make new friends among things as among people; and amongst the old things, I find, I care each year for fewer pictures, for fewer buildings and books."

"I daresay there is a charm in the new things," she assented, "but it does not find me. We lose some grace and flexibility of spirit, I suppose. You count on remaining always in France?"

"For myself, yes; I feel less keenly that I have lost my way in my world in a place where I could never have found my way. I may come back to this side for some years for Nan."

He had never spoken to her, nor to any one, she fancied, in this accent about himself.

"We have both of us lost our way in our world," she said after a pause; and then presently: "Nannie is very lovely, I have still flexibility enough to feel her charm."

"There is no difficulty about finding the charm in the young people; they grow better to look at each year: the trouble is that our charm does not find them. No matter: they thrust us aside, but they make a spectacle."

"And autumn makes a spectacle, and winter and spring; I do not find the new leaves less lovely each year. We talk as if we were very old; it is ridiculous, I suppose."

"We are very old: about a thousand, I fancy. It is rather good to be old."

"Yes," she said; "when one is as old as that."

"Do you know you all of you strike me over here as exiles? You are passably homeless and grim and sad at bottom. And I am an exile who has sought to find his home and failed."

"We are wistful, we Americans," she said, "whenever we stop to think: but then we keep ourselves busy for the most part; we keep ourselves busy in order that we may not stop to think."

The Brigantines left after dinner that evening, in a chorus of good wishes and regrets, very sincere really.

It is a personal service to be gentle and interesting, and Brigantine and Nannie had been both.

"Our visit's epitaph," Brigantine laughed to Alan, who accompanied them to the station, as the carriage rolled away.

"The capital letters of it," Alan said; "the catalogue of virtues in small letters will come later; there will be none of them that you could wish changed. Every one is sorry to part with you." He waited for an instant, and added in his flamboyant politeness: "You don't deserve your visit's epitaph, though. We owe you a grudge for expatriating yourself, and in particular for expatriating Miss Brigantine. She belongs to us; we shall organize an expedition to rescue her; and you—you will follow; we want you both!"

Nannie gave him suddenly a long speculative look, and in the end turned her gaze aside into the deepening night.

XXI

THERE was an impromptu garden-party that evening; a ball had been planned at Estcourt, but, out of deference to the eccentricities of the thermometer, the grounds were hung with lanterns, musicians occupied a summer-house, and ladies and their partners danced in the open air on the close-clipped lawn. The Brigantines were not forgotten, but they might have supposed themselves to be. No man or woman is indispensable, except to individuals, and the world must be amused. The next morning early Alan received word that Cecil was waiting to speak to him in the office.

The office was a severe oak-panelled room in the midst of whose tables deep with orderly papers, and dusky leather chairs, he had passed the intensest, the least self-congratulatory, moments of his boyhood. The place was dedicated to reprimand, in a succession of curt scornful sentences, like so many lashes with a whip. He never entered it without a recollection that he was a degenerate Windet, destined no doubt to go to the devil—no less—after some fantastic and not too reputable manner of his own. Cecil had never said just that to him, it not being his habit to deal in invective; but the boy had always been made to feel just that when he came up for examination or for punishment. On the morning in

question he found Cecil seated at his desk, seemingly in a brown study. He was motioned to a chair.

Cecil was not a man to lose his head over an incomplete report or to lend his imagination to a rumour in order to fill it out with details for which he had no authority. So far as Brigantine's statements were concerned, he took them for exactly what they said and no more. The girl had been frightened or had at least been troubled: he would form no judgment in regard to what had frightened or troubled her until he found himself in possession of something that might with a show of reason be called evidence. But he had heard that Alan had been paying her marked attention; he himself had seemed to notice Alan single the girl out; and Mrs. Windet, who was in all conscience a partial witness, had confirmed him in his impression; and ever since the announcement, that spring morning months before, that Alan owned the *Chronicle*, that Alan was the *Chronicle*, an estimate of Alan had been shaping itself in his slow, obstinate mind, which made it easy for him to accept an uncomplimentary interpretation of any conduct of Alan's, and difficult for him to accept a complimentary one. A responsibility for the *Chronicle* was possible to one kind of man only, to a man who could find within himself small reason to stick at anything, could find within himself small perception of the differences in things which made it obligatory upon a man to choose some things and impossible for him to choose others. The astonishment, indignation, and shame to which, at the moment of Alan's confession, he had refused a vent in speech, had thrown his mind

backward on a scrutiny and a re-reading of Alan's boyhood. A hundred details which had been thrust aside because they did not "fit the picture" were recalled to mind because they fitted the new picture; a hundred things, which at the time they happened he had not noticed at all, presented themselves in high relief. His indignation and shame at the moment when the revelation about the *Chronicle* was made had been held in check by his astonishment; his astonishment had subsided; his indignation and shame had become heightened by an emotion strongly akin to disgust. He conceived his world as that of an *élite* of the children of light in the midst of a multitude of the children of darkness; no heavier blow could have been struck him than to discover that his natural and chosen successor was not with him, but against him. He had not made an occasion on which to speak in his new sense of Alan's position in the world. His reflections had been too bitter for him to wish to make them more vivid by hearing them put into words. But the occasion he would not himself willingly have made, Brigantine had made for him. There was a longish pause after Alan had taken a seat before Cecil spoke. There had always been a longish pause before Cecil spoke when Alan presented himself in his boyhood "in the dock"; and the young man was thinking with some retrospective sentiment of the little chap who had sat in that same presence not many years before, and of the illimitable panic in the midst of which the little chap had found it possible to behave with decency; a panic for the most part lest he should break down and shed tears.

"Alan, it has been a long time since we have talked openly as men should. Perhaps we never did, and that is a pity. If we had begun earlier, we might have been friends. We ought to be the best friends on earth: I ought to be able to tell you what I must tell you with no expectation of its truth and with no thought of its giving pain. As the case stands I have to say simply that Brigantine cut his visit short because of you. What he said was that you and Nannie had hid yourselves in the bushes and that on your return the girl had had hysterics and begged to be taken away."

In spite of himself, the disgust and shame with which Cecil had come to think of Alan had gained a mastery of his manner and voice; there was a vibration in his tone that was as insulting as a blow in the face. He was speaking nominally of Brigantine and Nannie; he was really easing his heart of months of accumulated indignation.

"If our speaking openly would always, or rather at any time, have been like this, I think it lucky we postponed beginning till the latest moment possible," said Alan. "The very fact that you find it permissible to take your present tone and to speak of my hiding in the bushes is proof enough, if proof were needed. I think you had better withdraw the phrase. I took Miss Brigantine to the Beeches and back as openly as I might have conducted her to a window across the drawing-room."

"The phrase is none of mine and none of my choosing: I reported what Brigantine said: of his taste in saying it my opinion and yours, I daresay, would not greatly

differ. Though I perfectly agree with him that girls do not go into hysterics when they are conducted simply and decorously to a window across the drawing-room, or when they are simply and decorously marched up a hill and then marched down again."

Alan took a turn about the room; he had been taken completely by surprise.

"We have made a bad beginning," he said simply, returning to his chair; "I respect you, I believe, more than I do any human being alive; and even if I did not, I should be obliged in mere self-respect to behave as if I did. But it is out of the question to sit here and listen to you express your disgust."

"I am not much concerned to choose pretty words for things that are not pretty," said Cecil; "if you do not like to hear your conduct called by ugly names, you should not do the things to which ugly names belong."

"That is hardly a new beginning," said Alan.

"Damn a new beginning," said Cecil.

"It comes very close to saying that my statement a minute ago was not true. There is not another man in the world could take that line with me and not expect (I beg your pardon: it was not I that wondered we had not talked openly together) a blow in the face. I have nothing to do with Miss Brigantine's hysterics: it is passably indecent that they should have been brought to my notice or to yours. Yourself excepted, if any one is ready to assert that I misbehaved myself while I was alone with her, I am ready to tell him, in whatever form of words he will find most offensive, that he lies."

"What you are or are not willing to tell him, no matter how offensively," said Cecil, underlining his words with contempt, "is not the point: a guest and his daughter have left my house, and yours, with a sense of insult. If their sense of insult is not sheer illusion, I am bound to make reparation to them as best I can. I know nothing about the affair but what lies on the surface. But neither I, nor any man whose opinion would count, could place a high estimate on any notion of what is decorous and what is not, that may be possessed by the owner and manager of the *Chronicle*. Besides, Brigantine himself, and I, and every one in the house, remarked, I myself with extreme regret, that you singled out the girl for conspicuous attentions. I should not have been surprised if you had told me that you had asked her to be your wife: Brigantine was perfectly surprised that you had not."

Alan kept his temper, because he was afraid that if he lost it he would never find it again; and meditated on the relation of the exercise of power and insanity.

"I don't believe," he said with deliberation, "that the notion ever entered the head of any one except perhaps Brigantine and yourself."

There fell a longish pause after this, during which a door opened, and Isabel entered. She said she came for a bit of sealing-wax.

"Isabel," said Cecil, brutally, his tone still full of the mixture of grief and contempt with which he had last spoken, "Alan is of opinion that his attentions to Miss Brigantine have not been such as to suggest to any one

that he was seriously paying court to her. Had they suggested that notion to you?"

Isabel glanced quickly from one man to the other, and stood seemingly irresolute.

"I think the notion occurred to every one," she faltered, with a deep blush.

"Good God!" said Alan, half aloud.

"I think even the owner and manager of the *Chronicle* may not feel wholly at liberty to excite expectations and not to fulfil them," said Cecil.

Alan had risen when Isabel entered, and stood facing her with a look of anger and perplexity. Suddenly she took a step toward him, crying in a voice broken by quick sobs:—

"Oh, Alan, it could give nothing but pain to me to get such an idea, and gives me still more pain to vex you by saying what you do not like. Since the summer we spent in Newport I have cared more to please you than you can wish to know."

XXII

THERE was good fighting blood in Isabel: she believed — it has been said already — in her luck, her star. She did not count her failures; they did not “add up” in her consciousness; she stowed them out of sight in a mental attic, where they lay forgotten; the big front hall and the big front rooms in her house of memory she furnished with her successes. When she left the “office,” the sense of outrage which had vibrated in her since first she saw Alan and Cecily together gave place to a hard exhilaration. She had made her bet; her spirits always rose when she had made her bet. There had been things to plan, things to do, effective things to say: her spirits always rose when there were things to plan, things to do, effective things to say; she was pleasantly aware that she planned and did and said things well; the beginning of action was the beginning of a gladness in her skill. A few days ago she had been, — not at her wit’s end, she never confessed herself at her wit’s end, — but she had been at least at bay. She had changed all that; it was no longer she that was at bay; it was “up to” Alan to make the next move, it was he that was at bay. Take the matter how he would, she had bettered her case. If he announced his attachment to Cecily, he could hardly avoid announcing his secret meetings with

her, and even if he should not confess to them, the odds were great that either Cecil or Elderlin or both would interpose an obstacle that would keep the lovers apart. At all events, if the obstacle would not suffice to keep them apart now, it would still less suffice to keep them apart six months from now. If he did not announce his attachment to Cecily, it meant that he was as yet not formally bound to her; he would have been bound to her a little later. If he should hold himself formally obliged to offer to bind himself to Nannie Brigantine, — well! — it was not Nannie that he loved, it was not Nannie that certainly loved him; the affair with Cecily would for the time at least be broken off. And even if Nannie were to jump at the chance of accepting him, it would suit her, Isabel, down to the ground, that he should marry a woman he had not chosen, a woman he could not but think had trapped him, rather than a woman he had chosen. He would be a fool of course to hold himself formally obliged to offer to bind himself to Nannie; but she would set no limit to the foolishness of which a son of Cecil Windet might be capable; nice men were always fools — beautiful fools — where women were concerned; it was a provision of the Deity that nice men should be fools where women were concerned; the foolishness of nice men was the stock-in-trade of clever women, the cleverness of clever women consisted in a turn for making the most of the beautiful foolishness of nice men. Meanwhile, whether he should marry Cecily or marry Nannie Brigantine, he knew that she belonged to him. He might limit as he chose the kind of possession that

he would take of his own; the consciousness of it would stay with him; devotion is not so common a form of property that he could fling it away; no matter whom he married there was a bond between him and her that he could not break; by her speaking to Thomas Peyton she had bound herself to Alan; by her speaking to Alan himself she had bound him to her; bound him by a tie that would strengthen as the slow months passed and he came to know her for what she was. She had given him the key to her comings and goings; he might run as fast as he chose, he could not choose but read. The secret of Peyton's strong intervention in his behalf would come out one day; all secrets come out soon or late; a wise strategist makes them with a direct purpose that they shall come out. He would discover, as the romance in him, or the pride and chivalry, waxed weak, and the man's grave ambition waxed strong, what woman had stood him in good stead. Let who would be his wife, his wife should envy his cousin Isabel. She placed herself in a coign of vantage in the wide dim hall where she could command the door of the office and meet Alan as he left it. He was looking rather battered as he turned toward her where she stood before the swept and garnished fireplace with her back to a window darkened and lightened by sunlight streaming through a bower of green. It touched no fibre of tenderness in her to see him looking battered; when she had chosen the end she had chosen the means; he would have to be much more heavily battered than he had yet been before he would be beaten into shape. She was glad he looked battered;

she was glad he was susceptible of battering; her whole chance of success depended on his not being too hard or too elastic to take an impression.

"I was waiting for you, Alan," she said, with a certain nobleness of pride and self-control; "I wanted to beg your pardon for what I said a few minutes ago. I did not say anything that I did not believe; I beg your pardon for not holding my tongue; I beg your pardon for telling the truth; I have lied often enough to serve myself, there is no excuse for my having failed to lie to serve you; I was simply taken by surprise."

"Same here," said Alan, with a grim levity. "I fancy we were all taken by surprise. The emperor and I were having a bit of a 'rough house,' if you know so much slang. I wish you'd been in paradise, where by rights you belong, instead of in the chamber of horrors, that's all. The emperor was quite capable of 'hitting me where I live' without your help."

"I have said I am sorry; I can only say it again and again, and ask you to forgive me," said Isabel, simply.

"Of course I forgive you: or rather there is nothing to forgive. Cheer up — cheer up — the worst is yet to come!" said Alan, still grimly; and then with a sudden change of tone: "You're a dear girl, Isabel; don't be teased. I've been an ass, that's all. There's nothing to be teased about in that: I'm in such smart company!"

XXIII

THE worst, which was yet to come, came suddenly when Alan found himself alone. When Cecily had "thrown him down," he had fallen heavily, but he had taken his disaster in good part; there had been something in him, he remembered, which desired that she should throw him down; there was something in him which in his present circumstances could see the joke. He had gone stoically about the work to which the love of a nice girl would have been in his opinion so serious an impediment; before his interview with his father he would have asserted in all honesty that he went about it, if not without further thought of Cecily, yet without further hope. Of a sudden he became aware that while a man is himself free the chances of life are many, and include the reconciliation of old quarrels and the meeting of old acquaintances in strangely altered circumstances; and that all these chances had in the recesses of his mind been taken into account. He considered bitterly how simple, if she had accepted him, would be his present case. It would have been a plain, convincing answer to his father and to Brigantine, that he was bound. Bound irremissibly he felt himself to be; bound at least away from little girls like Nannie Brigantine, and newly wedded to his celibacy: it would be forsooth a

plain, convincing answer to his father and to Brigantine, that he was bound to desire to be bound to another woman whom he might not even see, and who would none of him or of his suit! In the unwelcome absence of any claim upon him made by Cecily, the case in which he found himself seemed to him, to his own astonishment, by no means simple. He had been accustomed to think of a man's part in life as an easy game. Circumstance mattered little; luck mattered little; circumstance and luck concerned the outside of things; a man bore his kingdom within him. He was no fanatic knight errant or saint; he was a hard-headed Yankee, with a sense of humour of which he was proud; but his very hard-headedness assured him that there is nothing a man may not meet with a tranquil heart of a sort, except dishonour in his own eyes. A man's rule of honour might be his own, might be unrecognized by any human being save himself; but so long as he lived up to it, without sophistication or quibbling, he might stand erect, and answer defiantly any trumpet-call and any champion that fate might send. He began to perceive that his own rule of honour demanded that he satisfy expectations people had formed of him, even when he had himself intended to give them no ground to expect of him anything whatever. No considerable number of observers pitched upon one and the same notion by sheer accident; disappointing expectations, like disputing a bill, was bad form except in case of patent fraud. There was a force within himself that fought on Cecil's side. Cecil's contempt of him on the ground that he was responsible for the *Chronicle* did not

find him. It was a pain to give Cecil pain, it was disgusting that there should be bitter words between them; that was all. He knew what he was doing with the *Chronicle*, and knew that explanations would serve only to bring into higher, sharper relief his offence that he was younger than his father; he could "stand for" harsh words, yes! and could determine to bear stoically other people's pain, when the long run would justify him. In the last resort he was perfectly willing to hold his position in regard to the *Chronicle*, come what might; he was willing openly to break, if an open break could not be avoided, with Cecil or with any one. He was not willing openly to break with Cecil, or with any one, on a matter of punctilio in regard to a woman. Lack of punctilio did not belong to him.

A bitter sense of fun took possession of him as this fact stood out in high relief. He was a Quixote without illusions. He had practised under-statement when he had told Isabel he was an ass. A Quixote *with* illusions was an ass; a Quixote without illusions was a monstrous superlative to which no monosyllable of scorn had yet been dedicated. Luck and circumstance had at last got even with him; luck and circumstance were just the devil. It was as good as a play—the irony of his case; he and his misogyny, he and his infatuation one day with a girl who would have nothing to do with him, and his entanglement the next day with a girl with whom he would of his own choice have had nothing to do. What the deuce had he said to her? The fact that he had made no formal declaration apart, he had no very

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clear idea. Since he had been refused by Cecily, he had been kept so busy seeing the joke that he had had no wits to spare for measuring his words to superfluous little girls. He had said to her that it was a fine day! He knew that there are girls who can twist even that into a proposal of marriage and a declaration of lifelong fidelity, but those are the girls to whom a more definite proposal of marriage is not made, and who relate the "offers" they have received in order to lend a grace of disinterest to their "scorn of the male"; and he did not think Nannie of that sort. He did not think her interested at all in him or his words; he did not believe really that she was at all concerned in bringing Cecil down upon him; he did not believe that she had had hysterics; it was Brigantine who had had hysterics — and Cecil, and Isabel, and every one else, perhaps, except himself and Nannie; they had caught them from Brigantine: Nannie and himself were the only sane people in the case. When all was said, he was not obliged to decide whether or not he would marry her, rather than disappoint expectations that had been formed of him and face an open breach with Cecil; he was obliged to decide only whether or not he would propose to her — and be refused. He was getting into the habit of proposing and being refused: the least ruinous form, by the way, the disease of love could take. In the meantime he would have to make some kind of statement to Urrey and Howard. In strict diplomacy he ought to invent a credible lie, alleging any possible reason but the true one that could make it imperative for him to take at just that time a flying trip

to New York ; but though he would tell a lie of some sort, there were distinctions to be observed between friends.

These reflections he made on his way to find Urrey, who had taken a suite of rooms in a sleepless "bachelor-apartment" house, in which at the dinner hour the light laughter of feminine voices found its way through doors and over transoms, to be replaced later in the evening by a clink of poker chips, the sudden guffaw at the close of an anecdote, the lilt and swing of street songs roared in chorus by men who were not ashamed to be overheard. No feminine voice ever issued from Urrey's chambers except that of Saint Biddy, the blue-eyed Irish amazon with a crown of ruddy golden hair, who conveyed her criticism of life in inspired blarney, and perpetuated the natural disorder in which Urrey lived, by putting his books back on the shelves as the god of chance might please with no regard either to author or subject. There was nothing Urrey kept in order except his perceptions and his scholarship. He ate when he had nothing else to do, or was too fatigued to do it, and slept when he could not eat; holding it an impertinence in the clock and in its master the sun to pretend to regulate a man's goings and comings. Day and night were just an incident in the scenery, and a man might quite as sanely elect to live in a forty-eight hour rhythm, or in no rhythm at all, as in a twenty-four hour rhythm. Any man who did the same thing at the same hour every day must expect to see and hear and think the same things at the same hour every day, and the man who made his days least alike might reasonably expect to see and hear and

discover the greatest number of things. The ideal life was that of a nomad in time as well as in space, with no fixed point except that of the intelligence. The ideal friend was the one whose door was always open, who might reasonably be expected to be awake at any hour of the night, and at leisure at any hour of the day, and who could be counted on to be interested in anything that was interesting, and to guess what a man did not care to say. Therefore, there were pictures in Urrey's rooms, some of them hung, some of them waiting and destined to wait to be hung; there was the book or magazine one wanted, if only one could find it; there were cigars, whiskey, and "club soda," usually in sight; there was probably Urrey himself, just going to bed or just waking up, as accident had decreed. In the present case Alan found him unshaven, seated at a desk in a torn chamber-robe, making beautifully accurate manuscript at so many words a minute by the open watch before him.

"Morning," said Urrey, still writing; "have to excuse me, I got a date with the muse; regular screwed with sublimated bunkum and epigram. Sit down and look wise, as if our special artist were photo'ing your mug for your constituents."

"Urrey," said Alan, paying no attention whatever to his requests, "I have been summoned by business of the last importance to New York: I leave on the nine forty-five this evening."

"The more ass you; no man of any common sense has business to call him away from the place where he ought to be. When will you be back?" said Urrey, still writing.

"God knows an' he won't tell," said Alan, dropping into a Morris chair and lighting a cigarette.

Urrey stopped writing, out of sheer astonishment.

"Have you gone daffy by any chance?" he asked.

"Not at all," said Alan, meeting his eyes.

Urrey stared an instant and then expressed an opinion in regard to the fate reserved for him at the last judgment; he understood that Alan was "up against" something serious. He supposed himself to be as fully acquainted in all essentials with Alan's concerns as with his own; but he supposed, too, that no man ever knows what another bears hidden within him, and that no man ever need be astonished by catastrophes.

"How much of it am I to hear?" he asked.

"What I've told you," said Alan.

Urrey continued to stare; he had got into the habit of it; he reiterated his opinion in regard to the fate reserved for him; he had got into the habit of that too. It was not the established etiquette amongst the trio to protest; asking a man questions which he would prefer not to answer, or bringing a pressure of any sort to bear on him to make him part with information which he would prefer not to part with, being simply a way like another of giving pain and setting a premium on lies.

"Don't be too sure of it," laughed Alan, in reply to Urrey's reiterated opinion; "you may be enskied and haloed in spite of yourself. In the meantime, when you've quite finished the expression of your emotions, let's talk business."

When they had talked business and Alan had left

Urrey to moralize on the secrecy, celerity, forethought, and diligence, which a man instantly shows in perfection when he is bent on making an ass of himself, a servant entered bearing a card which made the philosopher feel that when one has a sincere interest in guessing things it is good to be alive.

"Said she wanted very much to speak with you, sir; said if you were at leisure to receive her she would come up," said the bell-boy. Every woman who came to the monastery was "a lady"; the distinction between ladies and ladies was indicated by a difference in accent; in the present case the accent was one of respect.

Ten minutes later Urrey was dressed and apologizing to Isabel for having been obliged to keep her waiting.

"Not at all," said Isabel, putting his protestations aside; "it is very good of you to let me come here at all; at least, it is very good of you not to have been 'out.' It will be still more good of you if you will let me ask you some impertinent questions — and will answer them."

She paused, perhaps but half-consciously, to make quite certain that Urrey, who liked her, she was sure, had taken in the fact that gray homespun was becoming to her. It is easier both to men and to watch-dogs to be polite to people who are becomingly dressed.

"I shall be very glad to hear the questions; as for answering them, my manners are so bad that I cannot promise until I know what the questions are."

That was not quite true; no one can ask a question of a man with his wits about him without discovering to

him a number of facts, and a man might well find it worth while, Urrey thought, to promise blindfold to answer questions that a girl like Isabel took so much trouble to ask.

She looked him squarely, almost defiantly, in the eyes, and spoke with a deliberation that was a challenge.

"I want to know whether Alan has been to see you this morning; I want to know whether he intends soon to leave town." She hesitated an instant, still meeting his eyes with a certain boldness. "It is for his sake that I care to know, more than I can tell you; I have no interest in the matter except to serve him."

"If you wished to serve him as he wishes to be served, you would try to know nothing about him that he has not chosen to tell you," said Urrey, gravely.

"I don't wish to serve him as he wishes to be served; I wish to serve him as he ought to be served by people—by people who care about him. Besides, he does not know that I wish to serve him at all, or that I can." Again she hesitated. "If you are a friend of Alan's, or rather—I know you are a friend,—if you are a wise friend, you will answer me."

Urrey was a friend of Alan's, and wished to be a wise friend.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I don't know what you are talking about. I am as sincerely a friend of Alan's as you can be, and, speaking generally, he seems to me quite as capable of looking out for himself as I or any one can be of looking out for him. In my place, he would make you every polite speech in the world, and

tell you nothing whatever. In your place he would ask nothing of me; he would put his questions directly to Alan Windet. I myself am so different from Alan that if you choose to press your questions I will make a bargain with you. Tell me what has happened at Estcourt and I will tell you what has happened here. Otherwise—I beg your pardon—I will tell you nothing.”

It was Urrey's special manner to ignore the conventional distinctions between women and men, between class and class, and to deal with the human being before him indiscriminately, by a kind of higher courtesy, as a person of intelligence and breeding. If the intelligence and breeding were present, his interlocutor acknowledged Urrey's discrimination; if they were not present, his interlocutor felt the courtesy of Urrey's having taken them for granted. Isabel acknowledged his discrimination, but would have preferred on all accounts to have been held cheaper, and dealt with in a spirit of less resolute directness. She wanted early warning about Alan's movements, she did not want to pay for it, except as she had paid already. Alan could not follow the Brigantines without settling an infinity of matters with Urrey; she had known that to start with. If he were not going to follow the Brigantines, she proposed to see Charles Elderlin at once, the sooner the better: the sentences she had thought out days before to say to him struggled in her for utterance; she would leave nothing whatever, if she could help it, to chance; she would lose nothing whatever, if she could help it, by lack of dili-

gence. As she listened to Urrey making terms and conditions with her, the notion flitted through her head, that if she had the power she would wring the truth out of him with thumb-screws, before she would let him refuse to answer or insist on questioning her in return. How could she know what use he would make of anything she told him?

"Done," she said; "I accept the bargain."

"Alan has been here; he leaves for New York to-night at nine forty-five; he did not say why; he was not sure how long he would be gone."

"What has happened at Estcourt is that the Brigantines left last night for New York."

"Is that all?" asked Urrey, shrewdly.

"Yes," said Isabel, in the most convincing intonation in the world; "that is all."

Urrey waited a moment so frankly to allow her to add something, that she began to hate him.

"I'm sorry I made any bargain," he said colourlessly.

"I'm sorry you forced me to make it," she replied.

XXIV

SOME word had reached Urrey of an infatuation on Alan's part for Nannie. He had treated it lightly enough at the time, but he was quick to change his sense of a fact when by changing he could make it fit a second and a third. He did not believe that Alan was infatuated with Nannie; he had seen them together; he had seen in Alan's face that morning a gray underlying the tan such as does not come to a man till he is badly hurt. He did not believe that nothing had happened at Estcourt except that the Brigantines had been unexpectedly called away; he believed the pretty Isabel perfectly capable of telling a fib with the straightest face and the clearest eyes imaginable, and perfectly capable of breaking a bargain without a twinge of conscience or of discomfort, even if her breach of faith were laid bare; he believed her not distinguished in this from the majority of her charming sex; for whom, by the way, there were excuses—eminently explanatory, but not, as it happened, very honourable to their pluck. Urrey did not scorn lies: he was too much afraid of them: they were the devil in person, possessed of the devil's power: but he did not accept physical weakness or physical slavery as a defence for the slavish habit. He had been a weakling and a slave himself, in the brutal conditions

of slavery of a small boy among bigger boys, and had had his little soul bullied nearly out of his little body, until he had shamelessly prayed to be changed into a little girl. He did not know for what purpose Isabel had thought it worth while to lie to him, nor why she should have been concerned to know Alan's movements; any trifling reason would serve; though he was vaguely afraid of her as of some alert swift creature, secret and caressing and malevolent. What he did know was that Alan had seen the pit that had been digged for him, and that his feet were moving toward the verge of it, and that he would resent savagely any effort to draw him back.

He sat down to finish his work when Isabel had gone. Little girls might tell fibs for reasons best known to little girls, and a man's best friend might carry trouble hidden within him and show, for a sign that the heart was sick, a gray underneath the tan, a man's daily stint must be finished and turned in, well done or ill: he had learned so much at least in the public schools, where if his work was conspicuously bad he was whipped with a rattan on the palms, to teach him that the wages of failure is pain, and where if his work was conspicuously good he was jeered and boy-handled at recess to teach him that he lived in a democracy, in which no man may take precedence amongst his fellows except in a spirit of humility. When the tale of "copy" was complete and despatched by a messenger, he had saved his own soul for the passing day, and might labour to save Alan's. He chose a hat and stick and directed his steps through the heart of the swarming town where in the hot season people suffocated

in their beds, through parks upon the hills where foot-pads lurked at night and even during the day, along sunny suburban avenues bordered by sunny suburban villas, to the trim hedges that bordered Estcourt. He had no illusions about his chosen place of residence. He had not picked it out for its beauty, or as a centre of the cosmopolitan thing called culture, for which he had a great respect, by the way; he had picked it out as a strategic position, and as such viewed it with complacency. A man did not live by pleasant sights, by pleasant sounds, by pleasant companionship; at least the man who did live by these did not count, and the man who could not live without them was a man without a man's rude integrity and strength, an æsthetic debauchee, a moral invalid. The things that needed to be done did not lie among pleasant sights, and could not be done at all, as it happened, among pleasant sounds and in pleasant companionship. For himself he had a half-ironical sense of proprietorship as he strode between the tall houses on the clipped lawns; and the thing one owns is always in a sense good to look at. For himself he was secure: he would not make an ass of himself, come what might; he was strong and cool and at peace with himself and intended to remain so to the end, and to exact from his world the last farthing's worth of fame and power that strength and coolness and being at peace with one's self command in the open market. If Alan chose to shatter himself against the first big stone by the wayside, he himself would bring his gifts to market in safety none the less; and without Alan's gifts to rival them his own

would bear the higher price; but the price was not one that tempted him.

He found Alan in a big room at the top of the house which had been the boy's nursery, and which still contained, amongst more grown-up trumpery of the same kind, the diminutive riding-whip and stirrups that Alan had used with his first pony, his first target-pistol and Flaubert-rifle, his first foils and fishing-rods. He had his doubts about the advantages of a continuity of life like that in one house, in one room, for making a man fit to find his way amongst a nomadic people, a nation of exiles, like the people of the new world that will not for generations yet to come cease to be new; and he well remembered his sense at college, that Alan was not a creature of the same traditions and blood as his companions, that he was a foreigner with a foreigner's special grace and charm.

"Just making out the memoranda," said Alan, as he entered; "wait a shake and you can look them over."

"Alan, old man, I didn't come to look over memoranda; besides, we shall not need them; I came to be impertinent."

"You are always impertinent, but then you cannot help it; some men are born like that," said Alan, intent upon his notes; "some men are born with side, some achieve side, and some have side thrust upon them. You belong to the first class and I to the last, and I forgive you. Why shan't we need the memo?"

"Because you're not going away."

"Oh!" said Alan, putting a period to his writing and beginning to reread; "I thought I was."

"Come, Alan, I haven't gone so far to be called down. Of course I don't know what you are going to do; but I beg you not to do it. Of course you don't know what I am talking about, but neither do I."

Alan looked up from the papers before him.

"Cut it out," he said dryly; "cut it out: you are making a blunder."

"Nonsense: play ball," answered Urrey, coolly, in the new-world dialect: "you can quarrel with me if you like afterwards when we have leisure to consider your little pride and dignity. I've come to do you a service; if you want to show your common sense by knocking me down afterwards, or by cutting me in the street, I shall do nothing to hinder you. In the meantime some one has got to tell you that you are much too important to be allowed to make a goat of yourself. I seem to be appointed to do it because I can be more brutal than any one else. It is rubbish to pretend to be more modest than you are: in twenty years the men who own the earth will be dead; you know where you stand amongst men of your own age, and where you will stand when men of your own age take possession of things in general. It is going to be a close squeak at best for us to win the things we care for; we need you even now; we shall need you a lot worse before we are done. You are about as big a cad to cripple yourself now as you would be to break training."

"Have you quite finished?" asked Alan. "Whether you have or not, you might as well stop where you are. You don't know what you are talking about."

"I know perfectly what I am talking about. You needn't sit there so damned self-contained; I'm not a 'gentleman' with a 'gentleman's' popinjay reticence to hold me in check when a plain word needs to be said. There is a woman somewhere at the bottom of all this coil. If you are infatuated with her, you are simply a sick man, and must endure to be talked to like a sick man; if you are not infatuated with her, but are bound to her by some fantastic scruple of chivalry, you are simply a weak brother and must endure to be talked to like a weak brother: it is a piece of monumental silliness, or worse, to throw over the big brave world for a slip of a girl."

"Have you quite finished?" asked Alan.

"No. I've just begun. If you are on the point of seeking refuge in some insane platitude—that punctilio is the big front door to power and happiness—that the essence of punctilio is that one pays: punctilio is about as little like a big front door as can well be, and its essence is to possess less length, breadth, and thickness even than a mathematical point, which has none at all. No man can be 'true' to a woman without being false to every one else and to everything else. You have made engagements to other people and to other things: if you have involved yourself in an engagement not compatible with them, so much the worse for you; you must fulfil your first engagements first."

"You are a coarse-haired dog," said Alan, impersonally.

"Just so. Even a coarse-haired dog has his virtues: one of them is fidelity."

"Well then, I will give you a reason that you can understand. It is not one that has weighed with me, though in the absence of others it might: if I did not go East to-night the result would be a quarrel with my father, and a grave one. It is at least possible that by my going East to-night my engagements may not suffer; it is certain that by my not going East to-night they would suffer lasting harm. My power to count at all, even to go on with the *Chronicle*, depends on my not getting myself disinherited. I don't mean that I put myself a great way about to prevent it; but I don't intend to get myself disinherited by deliberately going against my own sense of things just to please you."

"And that's a becomingly wise speech, too. By your own words you *ought* to put yourself a great way about; a man who will not put himself a great way about in order to count, doesn't deserve to count, and ends commonly, I fancy, by not counting."

"Are you answered?" asked Alan. "If you are, I've no end of things to do."

"Yes, I'm answered; I've got all that's coming to me. It is all plain enough: no one can be descended from Cecil Windet with impunity."

"You would show better taste if you let my father's name alone."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of him; I was thinking of you. You are just a wasp with its feet firmly planted in a dish of honey; you can't help yourself, and you make it hot for any one that tries to help you. You are ridiculous to look at, and nasty to touch. Hand over those notes."

"I daresay I know about as well as you can tell me," said Alan, "that you didn't put yourself and me to all this nuisance just for the fun of the thing."

This was the man's acknowledgment that a service had been offered him, the male idiom of gratitude and affection being pathetically lame.

"I suppose you'd catch me by the coat-tails, too, or by the short hair, or anything you could lay hold of, if you saw me stepping into the fire. Hand over those notes."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't," laughed Alan, passing the memoranda. "I should say *et tu Brute*, and quote elegant extracts from Urrey's homilies on the text, 'Why cahnt you all become as good as me?' and should watch you sizzle on the nice live coals, you hypocrite."

The rough "give and take" was forgotten for the moment, as Urrey paused at the door, and the men looked at each other with the national quizzical look which is the birth-mark of their race, and which means anything that circumstances may suggest, from a heady devotion to a hard alert desire to do bodily harm.

"So long, old man; don't be a bigger goat than you can help."

"So long."

Isabel contemplated Alan, when, from time to time, she caught a glimpse of him during the remainder of the day, with a diminished satisfaction. She had been borne up by the strong elation of "doing things," but the things that for the present she could do were almost at an end. When he came to bid her good-by, she retained him for a moment, allowing him to take in an

admirably perfect expression, in her bearing and her face, of perplexity and hesitation.

"Of course you must go," she said at last, "but you ought to know that you have been trapped."

Alan stared.

"I saw it this morning in the office the minute I had spoken. That is why I was so sorry," continued Isabel.

Alan laughed.

"Then you were so clever you saw what was not there. I had intended from the first to follow the Brigantines; I was simply disgusted to find I'd worn my heart on my sleeve."

Isabel shrugged her shoulders the least in the world. It was very satisfying to her that the notion should have been suggested to Alan that he had been trapped.

XXV

WHEN Mrs. Elderlin died, Charles mourned for her with the dumb fidelity of a dog. He had somewhat scandalized his household, and had wholly scandalized Mrs. Elderlin's mother and sister, when she was dying. He had put them brutally, by sheer physical force, out of the room, and locked the door. Happily they had the baby to occupy them. It was not until the next morning that he came out; and when he did, he passed the members of his household by as if he did not see them, and left remarks addressed to him unanswered. He looked like a big man in a bad temper, and when he had found his way to the sideboard and taken three fingers of whiskey, he went for a walk. The doctor in waiting said that Mrs. Elderlin had been twelve hours dead. Elderlin made no effort to see her face again, and at the funeral and for a long time afterwards maintained the same formidable countenance, and declined either to see or to speak to the people about him. When finally it became necessary that he should be consulted on business (Thomas Peyton was the man who first broke in upon him), he gave his directions with a gentleness that was wholly new in him. Business, however, was the only subject on which he was approachable—excepting always the baby. He never gave words to his devotion to Cecily; but he spent hours in the room

with her; with an infinite pity in his big intrepid face while she was a blinking helpless little thing; with a grim amusement when she could be made to clasp his finger and to smile. From the minute she could walk and talk, she was the only person in the world who approached him with utter confidence. From the moment she was capable of knowing what she wanted, and what other people wanted, she became the head of the house. All petitions reached Elderlin through Cecily, and all were granted.

"Cissie, I am a philosopher at the court of a tyrant," he would say gravely.

"Oh, papa, I love you ever so much — *ever* so much, and I *want* it," she would reply, with abundant italics, her arms round his neck.

"Cissie, this is little better than blackmail."

"You will do it, papa; won't you? I *know* you will."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, it is just possible I might — for a kiss."

She gave the kiss, and pressed her cheek to his with a little girl's great hug and a murmur of small words of gratitude, and had her way.

Apart from his absences on business and his expeditions with dog and gun or rod and line, from the time she was seven he could not rest content to have her out of his sight.

She thought this perfect while she was a little girl. In the absence of other playmates she found it adorable to be taken with Elderlin whenever he left the house, and to have him alternately chaff her and gravely talk of his affairs with her as if she were quite grown up. She found

it adorable to be permitted to choose at will among the books in the bookcases, and to sit reading them, while Elderlin was busy with his correspondence or accounts. It was out of these books that her first dissatisfaction with the arrangement she had regarded as adorable came. James Elderlin, her grandfather, had been a student in his way, and his library was not what a careful mamma would have prescribed for a little girl. It is possible that this library was none the less the best reading that a little girl could have; careful mammas, without irreverence be it said, being fallible, and little girls needing, heaven knows, when they grow to be women, the fullest knowledge of the world in which they live that literature can afford. Elderlin knew nothing of books except such as concerned special sciences applied to the culture of horse and dog and marketable vegetables, and was openly proud of Cecily's learning; and his pride, no doubt, helped her to perceive that Massinger and Dryden, Swift and Bolingbroke, were more distinguished company than her papa. He filled out this perception when she asked him questions, sometimes by confessing, like the good fellow he was, that he hadn't the least idea; sometimes, when he supposed himself to be informed, by giving her answers that she knew were sheer blunders; sometimes, when she aired her own opinions, by roaring with hilarity. "Oh, Cissie, Cissie, you're as wise as Semiramis. I don't know who Semiramis was, and I doubt whether she was wise; but I reckon folks thought she was; and that comes to the same thing." Cecily knew perfectly who Semiramis was, — not at the time when Elderlin mentioned her, but

fifteen minutes afterwards (she looked the lady up in a dictionary of Universal Biography); and she did not in the least think that to be thought wise, and to be wise really, *really*, came to the same thing. Also she knew that *reckon* is a Southern States provincialism.

One morning, when Cecily was eighteen, Thomas Peyton surprised her, reading, perched in a window-seat, in a bow-window at Soames. She was dressed in white, and the trellis across the open window behind her was thick with wild roses.

"*Bon jour*, Miss Elderlin; I was searching for Charles, but am much happier to see you," he said. "You look like a saintess in heaven, in a halo of roses, reading her prayers."

"Since when, sir, have I ceased to be Cissie?" she asked.

"In the last five minutes, mademoiselle," with a bow. "Since you have grown so tall and beautiful and good that even your godfather stands in awe of you."

Cecily liked Thomas Peyton, though she thought him sacrificed in a provincial town. He for one took her questions seriously, and for the most part could answer them; and could tell her stories of great chief-justices which made her feel that to be learned in the law was one of the most distinguished things in the world.

"I don't feel at all like a saintess," she said; "and I was not in the least reading my 'hours.' I was wondering whether this is not the worst possible of worlds, and whether the people one meets ever are as good and clever and brave as the people in books. *Are* they, sage god-papa, who know everything?"

"Cissie, you are several charming kinds of a fraud — you with your airs, and graces, and compliments, and wonderings. You were wondering really what I am going to give you on your birthday, this time next month."

"Oh, I wondered about that *long* ago, and decided it would be something too lovely for me to imagine; it always is," said Cecily, laughing; "but at the moment I was thinking what nice books people write, and wondering whether the people themselves are as nice as their books."

"They're a good deal nicer than their books, my dear; and for all that, they are much like the people one meets. If you don't see heroes and saints and martyrs in yourself and your father, — yes, and in me, little girl, — the reason is that your eyes are not as sharp as those of the people who write, at least the people who write well. Don't you look too far for angels: you might overlook a big burly one at this minute not a yard away from you. Where is Charles? He and I have business to talk over, that is almost as important as little girls and angels."

Peyton found Charles "pishing" and "pshaing," except that Charles's expletives were not literary, over a passage about the habits of wild duck in a book by "Stonehenge." When he had transacted his business, he paused for a moment's meditation, which he had found useful in the affairs of this world. Charles sat on the laboratory table and swung a leg.

"It's amazing what an amount of energy a big man like you wastes, Charles," Peyton said. "A pulley and proper 'contraptions' attached to that leg would weave a

yard of cloth. There is enough power frittered away in sheer ennui to do the whole business of life; it makes me melancholy to think of it."

"And it would make you and every one else still more melancholy to find the business of life all done out of hand. They would all take to high play to kill time."

"Possibly," said Peyton; "though that is not what I mean to talk about."

"You want to talk about that pair of bays—there were not more than twenty defects that I did not point out in those bays; you got them at a bargain."

"I had five hundred advance offered me in two days on the bays; I know quite well that I got them at a bargain. What I want to talk about is Cissie. The point is that some one's got to talk with Cissie. It is I who ought to do it; in fact I'd have done it on the spot without consulting you, if I had not known it would make you hot under the collar."

"Thanks," said Elderlin, with a marked change of tone; "I can talk to Cissie quite well myself. What is she to be talked to about? I've noticed of late that she is not in as good form as she ought to be. She needs a change of air. I was just planning a trip with a bit of fishing and shooting in it." Elderlin's tone was cheerful as he closed.

"Charles," said Peyton, "the things you observe will never be a patch on the things you don't. You and your trips with a bit of fishing and shooting in them! Cissie is as 'fit' as I am; she's not moping; she's only reading the wrong books, and some one has got to tell

her so. If you think the job a nice one, I wish you joy of it."

"I guess her books are all right; she's only reading the things the governor collected. I know about as much about books," laughed Elderlin, "as I do about Sanscrit."

"You flatter yourself, Charles old man; your knowledge of Sanscrit is scholarly by comparison. Damn it, she's reading things about free-love and atheism and heaven knows what. She had Godwin in her hands an hour ago, and a Shelley in her lap; though I might as well tell you she had a basilisk in her hand and a hippogriff in her lap, for all that means to you, you unlettered barbarian."

The only word in this that Elderlin pretended to understand was "free-love," but that one word was enough. Before his marriage he himself had not been what he would have called a "milk-sop," or, in a flight of Biblical reference, a "Joseph," — but Cissie! His big body slowly filled with anger, and when he was angry his countenance was not pleasant.

"Just so; I might even say precisely," said Peyton.

"I'll have the books carted out of the house tomorrow. I thought the governor's books were all right, and Shelley — I used to read Shelley."

"Not on your life, you won't have the books carted out of the house. It only needs a silly trick like that to make Cissie sure you're an ass, and I'm another," said the lawyer. "Never mind about your governor; he knows what's what by this time better than any of us. And never mind about what you've read; you read an ode to moonshine in Shelley, I suppose; you never

read a line of his so as to understand it. The point is that the things she is reading are clever; the worst cases are always tried by the cleverest counsel; it is only the cleverest counsel that can make anything out of them. If she is to be spoken to, the thing must be done with delicacy, — and I might as well recommend delicacy to a pair of tongs.”

Elderlin considered Peyton’s recommendation to delicacy all that afternoon; punctuating his reflections from time to time by confounding his luck that the girl had not a mother; which, considering the personality of the late Mrs. Elderlin, was an evidence on his part rather of distress than of discrimination. When the evening came he spoke to her; and he was “delicate” — as much so, perhaps, as it is possible for a man to be when in the last resort he takes for granted a right to command. He had learned gentleness when he had learned grief. It was the custom of the house to follow dinner with a game of chess, at which five times out of six, to Elderlin’s boisterous delight, Cecily beat him. The games were not commonly of long duration; Elderlin’s practice being to throw out his pawns and bring his fighting pieces “out” in one fierce assault that was perplexing rather than alarming. When the evening’s game was done, and he had called her a female Hannibal (his ideas of Hannibal were confessedly vague), and had declared that he would never play with her again, and that in ordinary filial duty she ought to let him win at least two games out of three, he told her very simply what Peyton had said to him that morning about her reading. He paid small

consideration to the fact that he was betraying Peyton ; it was not his habit to consider any one where Cecily was concerned. When he had finished his narrative, he became conscious that he was not good at disquisition, and came to a momentary halt. Cecily had looked in her lap and showed him her eyelids from the moment he began to speak, knowing instinctively how best to meet a domestic scene, as a duck knows instinctively how to take to water.

"Cissie," he began ; "Cissie," — he said Cissie three shivering times, and then gathered strength and took a cold plunge, coming up smiling.

"Cissie, I'm as illiterate as a pig — as illiterate as two pigs, if two are more illiterate than one. And hang it, I can't discuss things ; I never could ; I can only lay you five to one on my opinion ; and that don't mean anything — I never see why not ! — to one of the clever ones like you. But Peyton knows books as I know horses, and he wouldn't have said what he did, if he hadn't been cocksure. What I want is this, Cissie, you witch," — the big voice vibrated with affection as it said "you witch," — "I want a favour. You know better than I what things I don't want you to read. I want you to promise you will not read, or pay attention to, the books I don't like. There, the thing's plain at last. I don't know that I ever asked a favour before. I ask that. Do you promise ?"

He asked it squarely. Peyton had done him injustice ; the lawyer himself could not have pleaded so well. Cecily still masked her sentiments in lowered eyelids.

"Yes, papa," she said ; being scrupulous to accent the last syllable.

XXVI

SHE did not keep her promise. She thought it monstrous at the moment it was exacted of her, and she knew it to be already futile. It amounted to nothing less than asking her to confine her perceptions to the limits found natural by a less keen, less educated intelligence. The people from whose company Elderlin wished to exile her, were confessedly cleverer than himself. Being cleverer, it did not occur to her that they might be less near the truth, and that Elderlin's life might have touched depths of mature passion and mature wisdom that some at least of them had never known. Elderlin lacked the magic word; and Cecily was very much the servant of the magic word. She dreamed long day-dreams of a company in which all the women were both blue-stockings and belles without ceasing to be to their finger-tips *grandes dames*, and in which all the men were combinations of the savant and the hero as rarely to be met with in the actual world as a centaur. She did not for an instant fancy that the combination was rare, or that the company of which she dreamed was non-existent; she thought she could point her pencil to the exact place on the map in which it was to be found. For the young American the scene of "Clarissa" or of "Humphrey Clinker" is as foreign as the scene of "Mid-

summer Night's Dream"; England and France are accessories to literary history and novels of adventure, and a visit to them is a visit to fairyland made real, where none but the most enchanting people live and none but the most enchanting things have happened. She did not think it a personal injustice that she was not made a member of the select company she imagined; she had much too humble an estimate of her abilities for that. But she thought it a grave misfortune to have been born at all in a prosaic hemisphere, and she thought it an inalienable right to dispose of her leisure as she saw fit. As she saw it, her life had been little better than a slavery, and held out small promise of becoming other than it had been. She was the unsalaried companion of her father. His diversions were not hers; his hunting and fishing revolted her; hunting and fishing were simply respectable cruelties. She was "on duty" for more hours a day than any salaried companion could have been asked to be; and had beside no vacations, no time or money with which she could do as she chose unchallenged. It seemed an additional irony that the amount of money spent on her was considerable. In the matter of her dress and appointments Elderlin was never satisfied that he had been generous enough. She thought needless expense a wickedness, and reflected that with half or a third of the sums dedicated to her use she could be innocently happy as the day is long—if only she could be let alone. She loved her father and honoured him, she told herself in moments of lucid self-analysis, with all the love and honour he could have received from the

most dutiful of sons; but she hated the nightly game of chess, and hated the evenings until good night was said, when she might read until she fell asleep, and hated the interruptions and excursions during the day, as a son would have hated them: what would her father have thought of a son, she asked herself, who had been content to acquiesce in such a life as hers? The one thing that made existence tolerable was the liberty at chance minutes to read what she chose. She did no injustice to Elderlin's motives; but his motives were sheer prejudice, they were the maternal agonies of a hen who had hatched a gosling and finds it take to the water. The ability to bring a prejudice like that to bear on her was the measure of her servitude. With a perfect sense of being in his right, with a sense of kindness and indulgence even, with the full support of every human being about him, he could exact a promise of her which would make her days a horror; and for her to refuse or to hesitate would be an act of rebellion and of filial indecency. She did not like rebellions and indecencies; practically they were impossible to her. She liked the pretty forms of devotion; but they ought not to be taken advantage of, they ought not to be made the means of coercion. She liked the pretty forms, and hated the enforced devotion, she succeeded in an indignant burst of frankness in stating the matter to herself; and she had said "Yes, papa," as much under compulsion as if a pistol had been pointed at her head.

At the time Cecily met Alan this state of things had endured, in her estimate, a thousand years. She had

undertaken her ministrations among the poor, partly because ministrations among the poor are sweet and charitable, and lend some dignity and meaning to a girl's vapid days; but still more, perhaps, because they took her for hours together out of the house: they made her less accountable for her time. She became interested in many of the people she relieved, but her interest did not make her feel the less that she lived among them in exile, and their distresses horrified her. Alan, from the first, she frankly liked: certainly his talk was more like what she wanted than the talk of anybody else that she had met, and he seemed to belong to a world in which the people were at least alive. His asking her to marry him she found very natural and very nice. Perhaps she even loved him a little in return; she did not ask herself: she did not know. It was not of love she was in quest; it was of access to a larger world in which the people were alive. Even if she had loved him more, and known at heart that she desired to be his wife, she would not have met him with the swift avowal of love implied in giving him leave to seek admission to her father's house. She had no notion of throwing herself over a precipice—of not keeping something back. There was something essentially vulgar, she thought, belonging to the love affairs of the lower orders, in a woman's abandoning herself to her affection without reserve. She possessed the current American conception that a woman is by birthright something for some one else to dedicate himself to and to do things for. How she got the conception she did not know; it was in

the air ; she was so little conscious of possessing it that she never thought of asking herself on what grounds it could be justified, or whether it could be justified at all. In refusing him for the reason that she gave him, she felt that she was playing a daughter's and a modest woman's proper part ; from a modest woman, she believed, a first refusal was a thing of course. To press his suit beyond a first refusal was a lover's proper part. In the beginning, when he ceased to meet her in her rides, she thought of him as pining in secret ; she found it very natural and very nice in him to pine in secret, and meditated on him with a certain tenderness. As time passed, and it became clear that he had accepted his first rejection, she thought of him and his brief love-making with something like disdain.

XXVII

TEN days after Alan's departure for New York Howard Lidcott came to Soames one afternoon in regard to the purchase of some polo ponies. He and Elderlin had met a number of times before, at races, which Cecil Windet had ceased to attend, in clubs, on hunting and shooting parties. The selection of the ponies had been a matter of some prolixity, and ended by Elderlin's pressing Howard to stay to dinner. Howard was at his best; he bubbled with allusion and anecdote; he was pleased with himself, with his ponies, with his hosts; he beamed discreetly upon Cecily. She had spent two winters in New York: they had a score of common acquaintances whom he had seen later than she. He was vivacious, he was autobiographic, he was intimate, he was indiscreet. Every one not an absolute fool is charming when he is vivacious, autobiographic, intimate, and indiscreet. He did not mention Alan's surname, but he talked of him; he talked of the big trio, Alan, Urrey, and, modestly, of himself; of the friendship that bound them together, of their adventures by land and sea. He made no haste to leave after dinner; he broke engagements recklessly in a good cause; he despatched a couple of telegrams. When he had stayed as long as he had decently any excuse for, and had risen in a burst of exclamations to take his leave —

"Mr. Elderlin," he said, laughing, "if you don't say I may come again I shall sprain an ankle at your gate or break my neck on purpose to be brought here. Miss Elderlin, do intercede to save my neck. It's always been considered permissible, and even graceful, for ladies to intercede to save a man's neck, or to send him out, with their blessing, to get it decently broken."

Cecily betrayed no haste either to second Howard's effort to make himself an intimate in the house, or to suggest that she would prefer to have him detained forcibly at Soames for a certain time. Elderlin relieved her of all need to choose by saying that the words of invitation were on his lips. The next day Howard sent her a box of flowers.

He made a dozen occasions in rapid succession for seeing her after that. He gave her to understand in a variety of ways, of which his practice had supplied him with a great number, that she was rather more wonderful than the morning stars; and he meant it. It was the secret of his success, such as it was, in his affairs of the heart, that his sincerity in each case was indubitable, convincing, the very essence of the man and of his every act and word: there was not a shadow of pretence or reticence about him. He did not in the least ask her or expect her, he said, to care for him; he was quite aware that that was beyond his deserts and out of the question. He asked her only not to mind if he cared for her. He concealed nothing about himself that she could find to his discredit; he did not thrust his shames and blunders upon her, but one by one, when they were necessary to correct some impression she had conceived of him, he

brought them out, with crudity, blushing like a school-boy. He assured her again and again that Alan and Urrey were better fellows than himself; he told her their exploits, he divulged their ambitions and his own; he sought her advice in difficulties created for the trio by Alan's sudden departure, and took her advice to the letter. "You have got more brains than the three of us put together; good Lord, if you had only been a man, with none but a man's obstacles to overcome, you might have done anything," he said.

She was hugely flattered by his confidence and the respect he paid to her advice; not as a mere vulgar tribute to her vanity, but as a confirmation of certain ideas of herself that she had begun to cherish. She had for some time felt that she must be clever — cleverer than many men who made a figure in the world; she was radiantly happy to find her feeling verified. It *was* verified, she triumphantly assured herself, by the success that attended Howard's plans when he acted on her suggestions. In particular she was delighted by the report of a speech of Urrey's. Howard had contended for an expedient devised by her for some difficulty of the trio's and had ended by flooring Urrey. "Little man," Urrey had said with admiration, "I didn't know you had so much muscle up your sleeve. That is to say, by muscle I mean brains. You must carry your brains in your biceps and your heels; you haven't a teaspoonful in your head; you've nothing there but the words and the music of

"Baby, ma heart's on fire,
Sen' me a kiss ba wire."

For all reply Howard had struck into the much more significant lines —

“ I’s e got a little baby, an’ she’s out of sight ;
I talks to her across de telephone ;
I’s e never seen ma honey, but she’s mine all right ;
So take ma tip an’ leave dis gal alone.”

It belonged to the man that in narrating the conversation he did not omit or slur over his reply. On the contrary, he sang it. Cecily did not resent the words, nor their implication so far as she understood it. The affairs of the trio interested her; they dealt with bigger things than any that had touched her life; she was glad to her finger-tips to take part in them. Howard at first she thought the most boyish—the most exuberantly juvenile—of men. It filled her with a maternal tenderness that he should have such opportunities and should know so little what to do with them. When he told her, blushing, of his grand passions, she was moved to secret laughter—the list was so long. She liked him, none the less; the heroes of her reading too had had a list of grand passions; the length of the list made him, in a manner, literary and historical. But the complications in which they had involved him struck her as frankly silly. And his silliness was a pain to her. After all, if she was to count at all for the trio and their aims, it must be through Howard. She was his counsel; he was her champion; she wanted her champion in condition; she wanted him, naturally, to win the first place.

“ I don’t believe any woman has more brains than three clever men like Mr. Urrey, Mr. Windet, and you ;

least of all a girl like myself who can know nothing thoroughly, down to the ground," she replied to his phrases about her ability. "The trouble with a man seems to be that he never knows what he wants. A girl always knows what she wants, and cannot get it."

Howard laughed.

"The trouble with a man, from the girl's point of view, is that he doesn't want *anything*, until he wants the girl. Seriously, I have never known a man who was not devil-may-care until he had found his mate. I have never known a woman who was not ambitious."

"You speak as if the matter were an affair of sex," she said, the least in the world offended; she was always offended by an accent on a difference in sex; it was as if she thought the Deity had made a blunder in creating them male and female, though she was not averse to accepting the advantages of being a woman. "You speak as if the power to do things worth doing had been lodged exclusively in men, and the will to have them done had been lodged exclusively in women. I thank you for nothing; least of all for a new reading of the hateful doctrine that the only use of a woman is to inspire some man. The man's big, grave ambitions may be left to speak for themselves; if men do not care for them, so much the worse for men."

Howard stared at her a moment, and was happily inspired to answer without levity. The politics of the trio had of late been interfering with every pleasanter employment, and wearing him to the bone.

"I allow for exceptions," he said; "you are the last per-

son in the world to whom it could be necessary for me to say that. But all the man's big ambitions strike me, and have always struck me, as laborious and sad — grave in both senses of the word; and I believe men find them so. Their reward is dignity, not delight. To people of my disposition at least, the need to be busy, to have fifty engagements a day, is a need that belongs only to a crisis of intolerable misery; and even in the crisis the engagements bore one. At Urrey's a few evenings ago the men were talking of the common pusillanimity of women before little dangers and little hardships, and their amazing audacity in the presence of great dangers when the men about them have lost heart. Urrey was contemptuously certain that the explanation is simplicity itself. Men are disheartened because they know the power against which they have flung themselves, and by which they have been beaten back. Women know the little dangers only: they are fresh troops, raw recruits, as regards the big dangers, and despise them. With the proper changes of phrase you would find that the same idea applies to women's attitude to-day toward the man's big, grave ambitions. They feel their allurements just as a little boy does. A little boy wishes to be a person of importance. But when he has broken his back and burnt out his brain to become a person of importance, his dignity means nothing to him except that at last, please God, he may lie down. I'm speaking, of course, of the ambition in which a man stakes his fortune, his reputation, his health, his life; in which he is in earnest, in a word. It is fun to play at big ambitions, it is fun to dawdle

and play at anything, though it is rather disheartening in the end. The difference between men and women in their attitude toward ambition is not one of sex, it is one of position. If men had women to work for them, men would be ambitious; if women had the work to do, they would be unambitious. No slave is ambitious, normally. None of the big things is worth having done if a man has to do it for himself. No book is worth a man's writing for his own reading; no railway is worth building for a man's own riding. The people who do the big things have to do them for the sake of something else if they are to find them worth while."

They were sitting in the portico at Soames looking across to Estcourt as he delivered this tirade. He was silent when he had finished, and then began to laugh softly.

"I am so little used to uttering the profundities that lie within me," he said, "that when I have been betrayed into doing so I feel as shy as a learned pig that has done its trick and is waiting for the applause."

"I think I like you better when you pay yourself the compliment of saying what you think, instead of making yourself cheap by rattling out the first thing that comes into your head. You do make yourself cheap in everything, by the way. Perhaps I don't know whether, if I were a man, I should willingly enter a race or not, but if I did enter it, I should not willingly take second place."

She spoke with a slow scorn intended to wound Howard. It did not wound him; it delighted him.

"That's applause enough," he said; "I don't want you to turn my head."

On his way home he caressed Beanie, the sorrel, and called him by name and spoke words of reason to him; and Beanie turned back his ears, which is a very different thing from laying back his ears, and waited for a signal to begin the rapid amble which in the States is called single-footing.

"Beanie, Beanie," Howard said,

". . . your sub-committee believe;
You can lighten the curse of Adam when you've lightened the
curse of Eve;
And while there's a man and a woman, with hammer and sword
and pen,
He'll work for the kids and the missus, forever and ever — Amen !

By God, Beanie, I've got a chance." Presently he added: "The hateful doctrine that the only use of a woman is to inspire some man! — and the still hatefuller, I suppose, that she ought to be happy in making a home for him! And I should be happier to tie her shoe-laces and to air and fold her pretty clothes than to deliver the most impressive and most tedious speech in Christendom. It's singular how tedious really good speeches are! It's still more singular how really good tedious speeches are!"

He gave Beanie the signal; Beanie, proud of his accomplishment, was grateful for a chance to show it off; and the cogitative biped on his back pronounced all horses feminine.

XXVIII

HOWARD LIDCOTT did many foolish things, but did them with a deliberate foresight. He had never minded being a fool; he had minded always being a bigger fool than he had expected. In his most audacious frivolities he had concealed a shrewdness and a worldly wisdom of which neither Alan nor Urrey suspected him capable. They might laugh if they chose about what he could be supposed to do when he was alone; he had the elder Lidcott's eye for facts, and his direct unimpeded vision of what at a pinch could be done with them. He had taken Alan's measure, and Urrey's, and his own, and the measure of the circumstances of each; and if he chose—if he chose. . . . Cecily would force him to choose soon or late; women were always forcing a man to choose, because in circumstances that must be half revealed to them, and must be half concealed from them, the line to take is plain.

He was in the midst of these reflections when he reached home and perceived a light still burning in the elder Lidcott's room. He found his senior in shirt-sleeves, pacing contentedly up and down, smoking a cigar before turning in for the night, assisting his meditations from time to time, as if they were so

many medicinal boluses to be washed down, by a sip of whiskey and soda. The relations between father and son had been ideal; each had been able to do precisely what the other could not; the father had made money abundantly, the son had spent money gracefully. Howard took a seat and helped himself to whiskey and soda. Lidecott continued to pace the room. He was a close-knit, hard little man, with alert, shrewd eyes, and a grim, satiric mouth beneath grizzled bristles. He had confined himself with self-conscious wisdom to the rôle in which he was at his best, and worked as diligently now that he was worn and broken, as in the time of his first success. He had purchased love as he had purchased friendship, and was satisfied with his bargain. Some men won what they wanted in one way, some in another; any way was good enough if only it served one's turn. He was perfectly aware that Howard would not have been so devoted a son to him, if he himself had ever hesitated to put his hand into his pocket for Howard's benefit; and he thought the worse on that account neither of Howard nor of himself.

"Daddy, your dissipations are appalling; this sporting life will knock you up. Whiskey and cigars at this hour of night are unimaginable," Howard began. "I ought to have been a daughter to remind you how often both have been forbidden you. I don't know why a daughter's reminder is so much more moving than a son's. Possibly because she can hang round your neck. Do you think it would help matters if *I* were to hang round your neck? If it will, I offer myself a sacrifice."

"Thanks; if I had intended to quit, I should have done so long ago, without any one's troubling to remind me. I never went to a doctor in my life that he didn't try to lengthen the days in which I should not be doing as I want, and to shorten the days in which I should be doing as I want. A man's body or health or brain is one of his possessions like another, to be used like another to serve his ends, and a physician who knows his business is just a specialist who can tell one how to do as one likes with the least wear and tear. I might as well be imprisoned in four walls as in four rules of hygiene. It's rather decent of you all the same not to want me to step out; though I don't see much what you would have to gain by it. You'd just have to carry the weight in my pockets."

"It strikes me I do rather well at present in helping to carry the weight in your pockets; at least I lighten it," said Howard.

"Ah, that way!" laughed his senior. "You are a model son, Howard; I haven't a complaint to make of you."

"Not quite a model, daddie. I have been thinking with some shame lately of how little I do for you; of how small my expenditures are in proportion to your means. I've been working at a scheme by which I can stretch your idea of a model son indefinitely."

"You've come to talk business? — at this hour?"

"Well, if it's not too late for you. It's not too soon for me! I make you all my apologies for not having spoken of it this morning; but the truth is I just thought of it ten minutes ago."

"Blaze away," said Lidcott.

Howard blazed away for something like an hour, to his senior's deepening edification. Lidcott ceased to pace the room; his lines of fatigue became less heavily marked, and he looked for the time the man of practical wisdom and power that he was. His easy after-dinner discursiveness had departed. When Howard had finished, he asked a few curt questions, to which Howard had an answer ready. In the end he lit a fresh cigar and let it go out, while Howard listened to the ticking of the clock.

"You've underestimated the expense," Lidcott said finally; "but I back you. Back you for double what you ask."

The next morning Howard walked in upon Urry making manuscript, in pajamas, slippers, and a chamber-robe, and the big Bridget making the orderly disorder in which she excelled.

"Bon jour, Monsieur Ecstase, bon jour, Monsieur Sighs and Ballads, Monsieur Romeo in a boiled shirt and pantaloons. You look as if you had matters of importance on your mind. Wait till I've dotted a bashful *i*; you never had anything on that mind of yours of half the importance of the dot over an *i*. Bridget, me red rose of Killarney, ye behold before ye the blaarney-stone in person. Simple, in more senses than one, as he stands before you, in gloves, he is a countryman of yours."

"Good morning, Miss Bridget," said Howard, with his most winning manners. It was one of the nice things about Howard that he always had his most winning manners with him.

"Good morning, sir," said Bridget. She hung fire a moment, though her eyes were bright with a retort. "Sure, there's more than wan in the room with the gift of blaarney," she said.

"Sure, there's tree of us thin," said Urry. "Bridget, ye're a wonderful race: ye can govern iverything exceipt yere own counthry an' yere tongue. I never rightly trusted myself to know more about the business of people in general than I knew of my own till I learned that my great-grandmother was an O'Grady—descindant from Oirish kings, I dinnow?"

The big Bridget departed, he finished dotting his i's, and despatched his copy by a messenger.

"Well?" he said. "Americans always say 'well'; it is a sign of the national fatalism, pessimism, and resignation; none of which three things, by the way, belong to them."

"I've come to talk business," said Howard, with an accent of directness and gravity, which was entirely new in him. "Alan has had his chance and has failed. In less than two years there will be another canvass. Turn about is fair play; I want my chance. We have all worked for him; you more effectively perhaps than I; he has borne the bulk of the expenses. If you are prepared to bear the bulk of the expenses for the coming campaign, I will work for you. If not, I am prepared to bear them myself."

"You amazing nincompoop. Are you in earnest?"

"I never was so much in earnest in my life, and never expect to be more so but once. Alan has disappeared

into the beyond ; he might as well be in Darkest Africa so far as keeping his place in the running is concerned. He has crippled himself so that he is obliged to sell the *Chronicle* ; I have come this morning to buy it."

"I had always thought your disinterested devotion to Alan the most distinguished thing about you," Urry said.

"I have been perfectly and disinterestedly devoted to Alan. But I don't understand friendship's an entirely one-sided affair."

"You don't understand anything whatever about it, seemingly. You have been perfectly and disinterestedly devoted to Alan so long as you saw no chance to gain anything considerable by putting a knife in him. It seems to be my part in life of late to say nasty things to the men I care most for ; and you will have to take your turn. The truth is just this. Alan is not a scholar or a philosopher, or a dozen things that I might claim to be ; he is not a dozen things that you might claim to be. But he has a gift for ideas and for organization that neither of us has. This whole thing from beginning to end has been planned by him. Take advantage of his momentary embarrassment to cut him out of the place he has made for himself, or take advantage of your intimacy with him to adopt his ideas, and you commit a theft exactly as if you stole his house. The theft is the meaner because you run no risk of jail. There is no question here of turn about or fair play ; you propose simply to appropriate something for which you have given and can give no equivalent."

"In effect," said Howard, tranquilly keeping to his point, "you will do all you can to help Alan forward and to keep me back. You can't keep me back, however; I've sense enough not to lay my cards on the table unless I hold the game in my hand. The question is whether when I buy the *Chronicle* you will go on with it? If you can't help Alan and yourself in the way you want to, will you help in the way you can?"

There was a moment in which Urrey thought of pleading with him; there was a moment in which he was moved to anger and contempt. The difficulty was that Howard was not contemptible. He was a man who had suddenly swept all scruples behind him; he was recklessly in earnest; he was too dangerous to be contemptible.

"I would see you damned first before I would work for you, though that is not the question," he said. "You don't hold as good cards as you seem to suppose. In the first place, there are disloyalty and dishonesty in what you intend (I am still dotting my *i*'s!), and there is a long run. Personally, I back loyalty and honesty, in especial in a long run. In the second place, you can't buy the *Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* was sold yesterday. Also I have been asked to go on with it. If I do, the paper will not be for you but against you."

It was impossible for Howard to pretend to find this agreeable. Urrey watched his face for an instant, and said — "Check."

"But not checkmate," said Howard, rising, and yet hesitating to go. Cecily was making him pay, if only she

knew it. A girl never knows, perhaps, her power over a man, and that the word she drops, possibly by chance, is a burning brand in a ship's magazine, and that an explosion will follow.

"Of course you mustn't come here any more, old man," Urrey said, "but I can't let you go like that. I daresay it's 'low,' but I like you, damn you. There's been too much between us. Good-by, — and bad luck to you!"

He held out his hand.

When Howard had gone, Urrey meditated on the mystery of things and wondered who the woman was. He never doubted that there was a woman. Death and disease and love — he prayed to be delivered from them, equally. He was not disposed to be bitter or rebellious against any of the three ; but he thought of them as he thought of stupidity or poverty, as among the gravest misfortunes that could happen to a man, with no consent of his own. Happily the least grave of all was the one that no man may escape. At a pinch he could face death tranquilly. At a pinch he was horribly afraid he could face one of the other two, not with tranquillity, but with a wild passion of gladness.

XXIX

THAT, however, being a matter of no immediate concern to him, he did not dwell on the thought of it. His immediate concern lay in the fact that the *Chronicle* had changed hands, and that when he had been asked to continue in the management he had demanded a meeting with the new owners. "That," he had been told, "is impossible. "Nothing," he had replied, "is impossible. That of course, is not true, but its inexactness precisely fits the statement to which it is a retort. I happen not to like mysteries, except those of my own creating; I work with no man I am not acquainted with." Thereupon his interlocutor had retired to report progress, and Urrey received a telegram, upon which he passed many sage reflections on the virtue of knowing what one wants and insisting upon having it. The new proprietors would wait on him at once. He was expecting them when Howard came. He was expecting them when Miss Windet was announced. He was not in the proper garb to receive Miss Windet, and was obliged to keep her waiting. A man he would have received draped in a sheet, which is nineteenth century for a fig-leaf.

Isabel was always so fittingly clad that Urrey conceived her ego as face, habit, gloves, and accessories.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Windet; I seem always des-

tined to keep you waiting, when you do me the honour to call. The truth is," he said, with the downright veracity which he had found a good substitute for conventional manners, "I receive so few ladies that I require a certain notice when one of them is coming — like a bride, I must have time to prepare my trousseau. What can I do for you? As a professed misogynist, I am bound to suppose that you would not have visited me unless there were something I could do for you. As a professed servant of open speech, I am bound to confess that I shall be glad to do it, if I can."

"That is much more gallant than the message you sent me yesterday," said Isabel, laughing. "You are not noted for your gallant messages. You have your pose to keep up, I daresay; you adopt a pose in order to give yourself a definite outline — to give yourself style, like a work of art. You are right. I did come to ask a favour; I came to ask you to go on with the *Chronicle*."

"My dear Miss Windet, what on earth, or in heaven, have you to do with the *Chronicle*?"

"Everything. Everything, simply. The elephant is mine; mine, as much as a pet poodle. I am the mystery that you insist on having revealed to you. I am also the mystery that you do not like because I am none of your creating. I did, as you see, give you twenty-four hours' notice."

She was not given to smiles, but she beamed upon him.

"If you call this revealing a mystery!" he said. "May I ask whether it was you also for whom Peyton

has been acting this past year? I understood that the parties were the same."

"Yes — me; all me," she laughed. "Don't conceal your assorted emotions; as the professed servant of open speech, you are bound to give them free play. Though that is not to the point. You have said you will do me a favour gladly; I have asked the favour."

"I have walked into a trap that a pretty lady has prepared for me, and the pretty lady has touched the spring that shuts me in. How free a hand shall I have if I go on?"

"You do not keep your promises so gallantly as you make them."

"All things in their proper time and place, Miss Windet. The moment of gallantry is past. You must not expect monotony from me, not even a monotony of gallantry. How free a hand shall I be allowed?"

"Not a free hand at all. Freedom is a wholly male conception, as Aunt Bettie would say. No woman understands the notion at all except as applicable to herself. If you go on, as you call it, you will conduct the paper exactly, mathematically, on the present lines; and do precisely as you have done, or better. If you vary a hair's breadth, the mysterious management will indicate a wish to read your resignation. To clinch the matter," she said, "if you don't do precisely what I want, I will manage the elephant myself, and you may imagine what a figure of fun the elephant will prove."

"I beg your pardon, may I be impertinent?" asked Urrey.

"No, you may not; but you may ask the question you wish."

"I won't ask a question; I will make a statement. I don't understand why you have taken all this trouble. I don't understand how it pays you."

"You would understand if I were a man. It pays me because it is interesting to do things, or to lend a hand in doing things, that one wants done. I wear a hat decorated with a bird and ribbons on the outside of my head, not on the inside. I'm very much like you, I fancy, on the inside. Why do you take all this trouble? How does it pay you?"

"I *will* ask a question," said Urry; "the last time you were here you made a bargain with me and did not keep it. I beg your pardon, you told me a fib. Why?"

Isabel did not pretend not to understand. She met his eyes with all the self-possession in the world.

"Because what you asked was none of your business. Or rather, because it served my turn to keep you in ignorance, so long as I could, of what you wished to know."

"Why then did you make the bargain?"

"Because I wanted to know what you could tell me, and you made the bargain a condition. Oh, I cheated you, if you like. In the same circumstances I would cheat you again."

"That's at least honest."

"It's more than at least honest. At the least it tells you what you need to know about the present case. 'All things are fair in love and war' — it was a man, not a woman, I suppose, who first said that. When I came

here the other time, you and I were on the opposite sides; there was war between us. You didn't know it; so much the worse for you; though you suspected it. At present we are on the same side—sworn allies. At least, what I want is to keep Alan's place warm for him against his return. If you want that, we are more than allies, we are comrades. I never yet saw the use, or the justice, of treating one's enemies and one's friends alike. If you find that wicked, then simply you find me wicked. You are likely to find me so to the end of the chapter. Though in the same sense you are likely to find yourself wicked, too. At least if you are not, I will have nothing to do with you."

Urrey laughed, and asked permission to pace the room.

"I could sit still and think if I lit a cigarette," he said, "but I find walking simpler. All men must do something when they violate their temperament by thinking. They lack the training in sitting still that a girl gets in the invisible hareem."

He paced the room for an eternity, which is to say for fifteen minutes. Isabel watched him and meditated on the amazing difficulty of the male in general in knowing its own mind.

"I like you a lot, though some of your notions are appalling," he said, sitting down. "That is impudent, but it is not an impertinence. If you still wish it, I will go on with the *Chronicle*."

"That is nice. It is good of you. You are not half so—so far from white—as you paint yourself. And I don't a bit mind your liking me."

"And you don't a bit care whether I like you or not so long as I serve you."

"Have it your own way."

Before Isabel left, Urrey told her about Howard. She made no comment. She had got what she wanted, and had no occasion to use more words. She had too little distrust of herself and too much distrust of other people to be naturally a consulting animal. She could speak, when she had an end to serve by speaking, quite as she could have handled an axe or a stiletto, if she had had an end which handling either of them would serve. She did not conceal the notion that formed itself in her practical intelligence as she listened, from any idea that Urrey would disapprove of it. She did not need a reason for concealment. She needed a reason against concealment. The particular notion in question was that it might be to her advantage and to Urrey's to know Howard's movements. She found a city business directory in the main hall of the Monastery and consulted it. She drove to a well-known private detective agency, and left an order that a report of Howard's whereabouts should be sent to her twice a day, by telegram if necessary. She had as little hesitation in employing the detective agency as in employing the telegraph company. War is a contest, not of delicacy and of scruples, but of force.

XXX

DORA CRISPIN occupied a house in Longworth Street, where she had a maid who was respectful before company, and a "yellow footman" who was respectful at all times. The decoration of her rooms displayed her personal taste rather than a deference to the conventions of any school whatever. The divans were Oriental, the chairs Louis XV, the draperies, for the most part, wide stripes of highly coloured chiffon. The harmony of the colours, however, did her credit, and the effect was one of a barbaric splendour—the splendour of a barbarism of which the historian of fashions might have found himself at a loss to name the time and place. Her pictures were such as are to be found in the quarters of men at college and of bachelors who do not expect their sisters to visit them. At the foot of one picture, which the scholar in such matters might have mistaken for a well-known likeness of Madame du Barry, she had written "Portrait of Mamma," except that she had devoted to the spelling of "mamma" but two *m*'s. Above one divan she had hung a number of "brownies" in gutta-percha, and in the midst of them a miniature skeleton, with a card attached, on which was the legend "Not running." In the clothing of her body she was ultra-conventional, — any dress, as she well knew, becoming her, which did not wholly conceal

her figure or her face. Her visitors were, for the most part, men, Howard being the most frequent and the guest of honour. For women she professed small liking and less respect, though she was abundant in her talk of them; and Urrey said that on this one subject she was wonderful. She sang to perfection "I'm happy when I'm by my baby's side," and "If y' ain't got no money, well! y' needn't come aroun'," and danced with legs and arms positively inspired.

She was born in New York, on Fourth Street, just off the Bowery, where the inhabitants have customs of their own and their language is peculiar. Her mamma, when Crispin had an especially long term to serve in the "stir," married a handsome barber on the premises, without the formality of a divorce. When Dora was little, she learned in the streets the words, the orthography and pronunciation of which do not change from generation to generation, and which are not to be found in dictionaries. When she was a bigger girl, she was put to work in the kitchen and at the wash-tub, where she became expert in the backache and in the angry wisdom which the backache inspires. Population in the quarter is thick, and incident is epic, and Dora had no innocence to lose. She knew that to be freed from backache one must have money, and the way for a girl to obtain money, money enough, was to get some man to give it to her, or to make a hit on the stage, or frankly to steal it. She knew a dozen girls who had done all three, and who reappeared at rare intervals, for a brief visit, in a splendour of apparel and with a superiority of

tone and accent which made them the heroines of her set. The trouble with herself was that except for her hair and eyes and teeth she had no promise of beauty. Her bones were only less visible than those of the miniature of later date which was "not running"; she was thin from overwork, her skin had a tint of yellow and a tint of green from bad food, she was big and awkward. Her hands and feet were not ill-turned, but her hands were red and her feet were concealed in shoes the heels of which had long since ceased to be flat on the bottom. When she wished to be certain of the total effect she made, she had only to go to the nearest saloon. She did go from time to time, and on her return shed tears of desperation and rage. She was aged fifteen.

The beauty came with a rush at last, in the weeks of convalescence after an attack of typhoid. She was as happy as if she had come into the possession of an estate. She knew the market value of the contours which rest and sufficient food had brought her, as a member of the Stock Exchange would have known the value of a box of the bonds called distinctively "gilt-edged." She had always possessed "brains to burn," in the phrase of the day, which was her native language; she had needed only an instrument, she had never lacked ideas. When she became quite well again, she would do — things which it was not advisable to explain to her mamma, who had a vocabulary and a heavy hand, steadily in commission, and who at that time was far from resembling Madame du Barry. Simply her mamma would be at a loss for a new maid-of-all-work. The first time she could step into the street,

Dora proposed to turn a corner and find her fortune; she would not return to the maternal roof until she could do so in a splendour of raiment which would enforce respect and unwilling admiration.

At the period when Howard and Urry found her adrift, she had been travelling with a company of vaudeville players. She had not yet found her fortune, but she had obtained at least immunity from the backache, and had learned a number of things which had taken her by surprise. As rapidly as she could obtain the necessary clothes, she had made her way upward from Columbus Hall and McGurk's to the Haymarket and the Tivoli, and from the Haymarket and the Tivoli to the Garrick, known to the profession as "Molly's." When she learned that there were gentler fashions of address than those practised in the Bowery, she adopted them incontinently, laughing at her own blunders. When she was taken to a theatre, she had no eyes for the play; she fixed her attention on such of the audience as she thought conspicuously ladies, and fifteen minutes afterward reproduced their bearing and gestures, and their intonations and phrases when she could catch a chance-dropped word. She was a servant of perfection, needing only to know the right thing to do, to put it into instant execution. Her ambition extended even to the past; she constructed a legend for herself of a really charming parentage, and of an education in a convent, the precise location of which she left vague. Her escorts found her and her airs and graces and poses the best fun in the world; except that when she decided the man who was "putting

up" for her was not first-class, as she had supposed him to be a few weeks before, it was her habit to make an evasion, taking the furniture with her as a memento. At the end of six months she had transformed herself, and was ambitious to become a chorus-girl. At the end of another six she promised herself a leading part on the legitimate stage. She was at this step in her progress when chance threw Howard into her way. She found him just what she wanted, though she was at a loss to know just what she wanted to do with him. Nominally she wanted him to set afoot a theatrical company to be managed in her interest, though she would have been in a panic if he had shown himself eager to accomplish her wish. In the meantime she had allowed him to establish her in temporary quarters. She had asked herself seriously a number of times whether she liked him; she had found it perfectly satisfactory to conclude that he at least liked her.

One morning, not a great while after Isabel's visit to Urrey, a little man who had once sat opposite Charles Elderlin at a game of draw-poker, and whose photograph had been given for some years a wide circulation among the police, handed to the footman who guarded the approach to Dora Crispin a card, which read "Mr. James Davis, Private Detective." The little man was fashionably — almost richly — attired, and bore himself with an assurance almost equal to that of the footman. Dora was lying on a divan in a lassitude of physical comfort, admiring the lines of her figure and the folds of her house-gown as innocently as if she were a little girl and

her body and its drapery were those of her doll. Incidentally, she wondered what people who had everything they wanted found to do with their time. She wondered what she, who had for the moment everything she wanted, could find to do with her time. She was not bored or restless; the heart within her was purring as amicably as a petted kitten held against her bosom. She had not learned to eat or drink as a pastime. Outlandish or highly seasoned dishes she thought plain nasty, and wines made her sleepy and gave her the headache. She was not hungry for shows and spectacles; she thought it uncommon silly for people to pay to see other people gesticulate and grimace. Active games and sports, even dancing, if dancing be a game or sport, she found "too much like work"; she had had enough of activity; no one dances for joy when he has danced for wages, and games of chance she detested because she liked to save money. It filled her with an uncontrollable rage to see her stakes, which a moment before had been money in her pocket, swept away from her; there could be no question of mere diversion in a pastime that brought moments like that. No — to be sufficiently fed, to have pretty dresses and pretty rooms, and not too many of them, to lay by money, and to have nothing to do — she knit her brows and wondered with resolute common sense what more any one could ask. All those items made a life; and as for variety and change — change in the amount of money one has put by, if the change is from a smaller to a larger, struck her as the most delightful form of change imaginable.

"Show him in," she said, when Mr. Davis's card was presented. She half turned lazily and watched him enter, examining him and his rings and jewelled appointments with satirical approval. "Name's Davis now, is it? What a dead swell you've always managed to be, and so easy. You're the limit. You might have 'stood for' something handsome for me though, without hurting yourself. Don't we kiss our daughter except when we meet on a street-corner, *ain't* it? It's at least much more respectable to kiss in the house, *don't* it? Thanks, for a little one. Sit down carefully, or you will take that beautiful crease out of your small-clothes, which is literary and Bostonese for Plymouth Rock Pants."

She looked at him in broad good-humour; she always possessed the comfort of knowing that she could do her trick when she had to.

"I lived with your mamma for better or for worse, more than twelve years; you ought to know whether that was taking life easy. I've been in every kind of 'rough-house,' but I never met any one who could give you an earful in the same class with the things the madam could say in her little domestic conferences. Damn, she said things that made me turn hot and swear under my breath years afterwards doin' time in the stir; except" — he added, after a meditative pause — "when they made me want to roar with laughter!"

Dora knew perfectly what sort of things he meant. In the days when she was cowed with fatigue she had heard every defect in her lank body, and every little

device to conceal its imperfections, and every little vanity and pride that she had imagined secret, named with a pertinence of epithet that had hurt like a lash on the naked flesh. Father and daughter laughed in chorus. They had discovered each other soon after Dora's evasion, and had seen each other at intervals since.

"But that is not what I came to tell you. I'm not sure, but it's my idea that you are up against big trouble. You'd better touch that man of yours at once for all he's worth."

Dora's lassitude was gone without the formality of a transition. She leaped to her feet with the suppleness of a cat.

"It's a lie, it's a lie," she said hoarsely, not waiting to understand. "What do you mean?"

Davis had seen women at bay before, and was doubly of opinion that there would be big trouble.

"I mean that a young woman, a dead swell, came to the front office about ten days ago and asked to be put next and kept next to everything he does. What floors me is what she's up to. You can usually tell. But she's not his wife, she's not engaged to him (I've found out that), she never sees him nor writes to him, and almost never has. And he don't do anything that I can see, except mind his business and come here. And though I haven't told her he comes here, she's just as satisfied as can be with the reports and keeps putting up the dough."

"I don't see anything in that," said Dora.

"I didn't suppose you would, since I see nothing in it myself. I haven't got to the part yet that concerns you.

He's sweet on a young woman in Kentuck—another dead swell. If you don't get a move on, you will find it all off with him when you least expect it. That's what concerns you."

Dora pressed him for the details before he left; she got, in her own phrase, "all that was coming to her." Her acquired speech, her acquired bearing and manners, dropped from her like a garment. Even her resolute common sense gave way; she set herself the task of deciding on a plan in an ecstasy of hatred and fear and jealousy. She was reflective, she was exclamatory, she was subtle and cunning, she was violent. She tore her clothes off her and cursed her astonished maid, and at the same time kept the main points of Davis's narrative well in hand. It was ridiculous to think of appealing to Howard; when a man will, he will, unless he can't. She knew all about it; she was built that way herself. In the end she dressed with an extreme elegance and had a cab summoned.

Cecily was correcting a report and a speech that Howard was to make as the chairman of a permanent committee. The speech was to mark his first overt act of independence of Alan and Urrey, and was to contain in effect a declaration of principles. Correcting was a euphemism for rewriting; Howard had received her suggestions in amendment of the draft he had submitted to her, with a boyish enthusiasm; he had told her that she was the greatest thing that ever happened; and in the end the amendments made the original look like the first tissue of Sir John Colvin's silk stockings, celebrated in

metaphysics. She felt at last that she was in touch with life to the quick; not in the way she had dreamed of, not in the way she would have preferred, but in the only way possible to her. She was blithe, she confessed, to her toes. She was puzzling herself about the reconstruction of a sentence (she was studious of the construction of sentences), when a card was brought her which read "Mrs. Crispin." Mrs. Crispin appeared to be a very young matron of a certain full-lipped beauty and dignity. Her hat and gown were more effective and richer than any which Cecily possessed. Dora took in at a glance the sober style of Cecily's sitting-room. She had never been in a room like that. She determined to refashion her own rooms on the model of it.

"Of course you don't know who I am," she began, with her natural directness; "it is very good of you to consent to see me. I've no wish to masquerade before you; I am a person of no consequence whatever. I have no right to visit you at all, except that I am in extreme distress, and no one but you can help me."

"I beg your pardon," said Cecily, Howard's manuscript in her lap; "I know, I believe, all about you."

"Then *he* has told you. So much the better. He has told you more than he has told me. It is that I came to speak to you about. You don't know what you are doing; you are taking him away from me."

Cecily did not in the least object to Howard's having told more to her than to any one else. She did not in the least object to taking him away from Dora Crispin; she thought Dora one of the least proper persons in the world

to have Howard or any man in her hands. To be sure she was not perfectly informed of Howard's interview with Urrey, nor of Urrey's sense of Howard's change of face.

"I fancy I know everything," she said tranquilly.

"Every woman who has got what she wants knows everything she cares to. You don't know everything; you say you do because that is the shortest way to stop me off. I haven't come to be stopped off. You shall listen if I have to hold you: I am stronger than you. Yes, I threaten you, if you attempt to call out or to ring. You don't know what he is to me; you don't know what my life has been, nor what it will be if you take him away."

She had spoken with a vehemence that had brought her to her feet. With a sudden change of voice she told what her life had been — flung it from her in scorn. She did not rest in vague phrases; she possessed her mamma's talent; she found words as intolerable as the things they named; she spared no one, least of all herself; she made a picture. Then with a passionate sincerity she began to plead. In spite of herself Cecily was moved. The girl's vivid beauty, her self-abandonment, her theatrical poses and gestures, the power and play of her voice, her brutal directness, were like a physical contact.

"I am just like you or any other woman," she said, with the rude common sense that served her instead of eloquence; "I can't get what I need for a decent life unless some man gives it to me. Take him away from me and you turn me into the street, just as I, or a woman like me, would turn you into the street if she took your father or your husband away from you. And I am good

to him ; I am good for him ; I am a good girl. I don't take half from him what a woman like you would. Ever since he has come to me I have kept him straight. Every man needs a woman to keep him straight ; he was bad enough before I got him ! ”

Cecily relished common sense. She found in it, she thought, a contrast to the notions of the people amongst whom she lived. She recognized in Dora's speech some of the things she had been saying to herself during the past weeks. She too had flattered herself she was keeping Howard “ straight.”

While Dora was speaking, a door opened and Howard walked in.

“ Good morning, Mrs. Crispin ; I learned a moment ago that you were here, and hastened to join you. I beg your pardon, Miss Elderlin, for entering unannounced ; I thought I might be of service.”

Dora's torrent of words had stopped short when the door opened. When she saw Howard she turned the colour of things when they die. She might have prevailed with the woman ; she could do nothing with the man, except prevent another woman's keeping him. When he turned from her to speak to Cecily, she put her hand in her pocket, and disengaging it, sprang suddenly upon him, and stabbed him, twice. As he turned to struggle with her, she leapt back, and ran.

Cecily had her wits still about her. When Howard fell, she did not scream ; she went to find her father. Cecily was a wonderful woman ; she had not said a word for half an hour.

XXXI

HOWARD's injury was grave enough to make his removal irreconcilable with Elderlin's notions of hospitality. It was the measure of the length to which Elderlin was willing to go in the service of his notions, that retaining Howard necessarily implied receiving Howard's father. He did receive him, with punctilious formal courtesy, placing himself and his house at his service, and pointedly not offering to shake hands or to enter into general conversation; a manner which awakened in James Lidcott less anger than amusement.

"It strikes me," he said grimly, sitting by Howard's bedside, "that you have played the emperor below stairs rather a scurvy trick in getting yourself laid up here and forcing me to come to see you. He was as stiff-necked as a flunkey receiving a poor relation of the family; I've seen him gay enough on the race-track. I'm rather a big pill for him; and shall be a box of big pills if I don't get you out of this soon. When does the medicine-man say you can be removed?"

Howard had not been too badly hurt to follow a certain train of meditation, the upshot of which was that things could not have fallen out more favourably for his purpose if he had planned them.

"Since I pay the bills, or rather since you do, the

medicine-man will give an expert opinion in favour of his employer; he will go as far as decency allows, and stretch a point beyond, to find me irremovable till the latest date possible."

Lidcott chose a cigar from his cigar-case, and chewed the end of it without lighting it, and glanced meditatively about the room: old-fashioned rooms looked rather bare to him, though the prospect through the windows of the grounds at Soames met his approval. His glance finally rested on Howard, and was full of the hard shrewdness and good-humour which Howard was accustomed to find in it and to interpret as the mark of unlimited affection and indulgence for him.

"I guess it's the girl," he said.

"Daddy, your penetration is magnificent; it is vain to conceal anything from you that you know already; I will be open with you: it is the girl."

"This thing been going on for some time?"

"No, no; that is, it did not begin before I met her; it only began when I met her; and except upon my side, I do not know that it is going on at all; I only intend that it shall go on, if you will back me up, — and undertake to sign certain orders to pay."

It was one of the nice things about Lidcott that he did not disrelish replies addressed to him in his own grim humour.

"And I can back you up most effectively by signing promises to pay at a distance," he said.

"Well! — since you suggest it! — it would not exactly serve my turn to have Elderlin put on a diet of big pills."

Lidcott set his teeth in his cigar and chuckled inwardly behind a perfectly motionless face.

"The girl a nice girl?" he asked.

"Out of sight," said Howard, who could speak his father's dialect.

"So I see," said Lidcott.

The physician in attendance pronounced an expert opinion in favour of his employers; James Lidcott was called on pressing business to Washington and did not again trespass upon Elderlin's hospitality; and Howard was a welcome guest at Soames when it became apparent that his father meant to hold aloof. He was welcome to Cecily because she had of late come almost wholly to approve of him, at least as he now was and would be; he had had his lesson; an entanglement with a woman such as Dora Crispin bore on its face the stamp of youthful folly; and his pliancy to her own suggestions, in particular to her suggestion that he should not enter a race without striving to come in first, was the least questionable form of compliment and devotion that he could have given her. He was welcome to Elderlin because any man who is of the active temperament, and excels in athletics and in sport, and who neither brags nor butts his humour against that of his associates, is a good fellow. Elderlin's only pang in connection with Howard's repeated visits, and now at last his continued presence in the house, arose from a surmise that Howard wished to pay court to Cecily. He assured himself that he did not want Cecily to be left unprotected after his death, which in the course of nature must be not many

years distant; he assured himself that he must not deal selfishly by her, and that if she did not marry soon, the chances of her marrying at all would diminish rapidly; but no matter what assurances he gave himself, the pang remained. He would be desolate, lost, without Cecily. When Howard became convalescent and could be moved from his bedroom to a sitting room, Cecily paid him visits and brought him flowers and books and advised him gravely in regard to letters to dictate, the effect of which was of national concern. Elderlin diverted him willingly by engaging with him for hours together, after the manner of eighteenth century courtesy, in games of chance.

It was at the end of a bout at cards that Howard chose to announce his purpose and hope in remaining at Soames.

"I have been quite well enough for some days, Mr. Elderlin," he said, "to have put an end to the pleasure of being your guest. I have deliberately postponed my going because I am happy to be here, and still more because I cannot go until I have told you that I wish with all that is most serious in me to persuade you, if only I can get her consent, to let Miss Elderlin become my wife. I have not said a word to her as yet; in the circumstances in which you have received me, it has seemed to me your right to be spoken to before I said a word to her; the more so, because I know you do not like my father. I myself like my father very much; I am devoted to him; it is bare justice that I should be, though I cannot expect you to know that; and frankly,

bare justice apart, he has been as kind and indulgent to me, and to every one in any personal relation with him, down to the humblest servant, as you yourself, or any human being, could be. I am not, however, asking you to accept his friendship; he knows that you dislike him; he has denied himself the privilege during these past weeks of seeing me, because he knew that it was a discomfort to you to meet him, and that with your code of hospitality you could not refuse to meet him while I lay here ill. I am asking you only to permit me to win Miss Elderlin, if I can. I do not say that without a full sense of what it must mean to you to permit any man to win her; and I am as far as possible from being confident that, even if you stand neutral, I have a chance. Of course, I might as well make myself agreeable by opening fire on you with a Gatling gun as by plumping this at you; but I do not imagine you would like me or what I have to say any better if I beat about the bush."

Elderlin dropped his cards when Howard began to speak, and put his hand into his pocket.

"For my personal comfort I would much rather, I think, face the Gatling gun," he said. "My daughter is about all I have to live for; she has been about all I have had to live for since she was born. But that is not a reason why I should think myself the person mainly concerned; I have recognized that I should like to see her settled before I die. What is it you want me to do? It is true," he added, "that I do not like your father; though I like you for speaking up handsomely for him."

"What I want you to do is to consent still to permit my visits here, with a knowledge of what their purpose is, and to tell Miss Elderlin that I have spoken to you, and that you have given your consent."

An hour later Elderlin found Cecily seated before an open fire with a book of plays in her lap, dreaming of the fairyland in which she fancied such plays were written. He leaned against the mantel and looked down at her; as always a pathetic object to her with his one arm, his manly bulk and his good looks, his helplessness to amuse himself when he was not in company, his dedication to horses and dogs and guns, his gentleness and patience.

"Cissie, young Lidcott has asked my consent to pay you his court, and I have given it," he said, with a resolute determination to have done with a bad matter at once. "I would about as soon lose my other hand as lose you; you have been everything in the world to me since you were a little tot in shoes without heels; but that is just the reason why I should not deal selfishly by you."

Cecily dropped her eyes.

"Do you mean that you should like me to marry, papa?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "I should like to know that when I die you will not be left alone. The thing is too serious for nonsense; you have grown to be too beautiful a woman to be buried in an old man's house as his companion and nurse."

"Do you like Mr. Lidcott?"

"Well," he said, still determined to avoid nonsense, "I do not like what laid him up here, and I do not like the stock; but I like him; and it needs a good woman to make a good man, my dear; and you are a good woman, God be thanked."

He paused for a moment, looking proudly and fondly at her.

"At least it needed a good woman to make a good man of me," he added honestly; "but it is not the question whether I like him or not; it is you that must like him, and I'm not begging you to like any one. I would do my best to prevent your marrying an absolute block-head or an absolute scamp, but amongst men that are not scamps or blockheads it is for you to choose."

Cecily meditated on the length and breadth of the mischance of being born a girl. She could not be spared out of her father's house for even a year to go her way alone; yet she was so little needed there, that with his own good-will, and all the world's, she might leave it for a life-time, if she left it at a husband's side.

BOOK SECOND

XXXII

MRS. ALAN WINDET sat perched in the window-seat of her dressing-room, clasping her knees and peering out through the chinks in the shutters into the pallid golden day.

She was scarlet-slippered and scarlet-gowned in some soft woollen chamber robe, and her bare ankles and bare throat were very round and white, and her eyes and hair were very bright and black, and her face was very pale and definite with the fine lines and definiteness wrought out upon the human mask by the uneasy soul within. She had been crippled in an accident three years before on her wedding journey, and out of respect, she said with a note of mockery, for the eyes of people who are straight, she never left her rooms.

It was seven in the morning, and the air which played in through the blinds was fresh with the freshness of the night and the dew, reminiscent still of the mystery, the shadow and the silence, before the dawn. She had sat there since the first long slanting light, in a bath of reverie and quiet, deliciously aware by some heightened sense of presence of the moving sap and stirring leaves and twigs, and the whole still sacred commerce of the

break of day. It was by the same avenue of supersensuous intuition that she had perceived her husband standing by his cousin Isabel's "mount" (Nannie had seen him in riding costume a few minutes before stepping across from the "Pavilion" to the "House"—they stood within a stone's throw of each other), and giving her a hand up; and she was watching for them now to pick their way side by side down the gravel walk for their morning gallop.

It was no new thing to see them side by side, ambling to their morning gallop; she saw them every morning of her life; and her gaze rested on them with the same intelligent comprehension with which she went about her music or her painting, or watched the clock and silently garnered up the seconds and hours Alan passed in her company, and questioned whether he came as often and stayed as long as he used, and whether he talked, when he did talk, because he wanted to, or out of some sense of piety, of obligation to visit the sick. He was assuredly more desultory in his coming than at one time; she had recognized it long before with a certain clear scorn: scorn of herself for the exactitude of hour and date with which she could determine it; scorn of the world in which such things could be, must be, and of him its instrument, and of his hot fits and cold fits and hard unintelligence in setting his face against the implacable drift of things. She had stood in a kind of wonder of admiration of him before they were married; of his air of brilliant life and distinction and high good humour, as if existence were a gallant adventure to be carried off at a

dance step with picturesque coolness and strength and skill; but the bitter little comedy of their life together since was fatal to admiration. When she saw him with his intrepid exterior gravely playing his part in the shabby diminutive farce of marital fidelity, she could have laughed at him. Did he hold her wit so cheap and imagine she would take him at his face value, that he should put himself to so much pains? It rather rehabilitated him in her eyes to see him riding away with his erect, slim cousin; that at least was natural and genuine; he was under no ridiculous obligation to do that. Isabel was slim as a water-reed and her head was brilliant as a rank marsh-flower. She recognized Isabel's beauty quietly every time she looked at her; and tried quietly, every time she looked, not to hate her. Why should she hate her? — she asked herself in a challenge. Isabel was not hateful, she was only in luck; in luck to be beautiful, in luck to be strong, in luck to be admired; not least in luck to be ruthless and unscrupulous. As for herself, if Alan thrust her aside like a broken toy, what was she else, what had she been? — a toy for his pleasure and for her own, a plaything now with sunken cheeks and sharpened nose, with a hump on her back and a tongue tipped with flame. If her back was crooked, her brain was straight; if Alan was at heart brutal, it was fitting he should be so in a brutal world. It was her main complaint against him that he was but half-heartedly brutal. She would have liked him better if his brutality had at least possessed the grace of magnitude. The world is old and will not change, she said in contempt of herself;

the battle has been always really to the strong. In the infinite pettiness of human life on this dwarfed globe in the midst of a chaos of whirling suns, it betrays a lack of humour to be cautious where one treads.

She had said all that to herself often before she sat perched in the window-seat that softly brilliant morning; had said it to herself so often that she seemed to have passed her life in saying it, till she could say it at last without pain or passion, at least without much. It was a mathematical fact like the amount of one's income, and no reason could be founded on it why she should not watch the white mists lift and vanish on the far hills, or the yellow river run between its banks like subtile sand in the neck of some gigantic hour-glass, or even Isabel's sorrel and Alan's roan softly footing among the trees. The horses and their riders came into sight as she thought of them.

Had they really conceived a passion for each other, Alan and Isabel?—had they really overstepped a line? It made slight difference to Nannie personally, as she watched them, whether they had or not. What did make a difference to her personally was that the line was there—immitigably, ineffaceably imaginary, like the equator; and that they and all the world were elaborately conscious of it, and were eternally bearing down upon it, or beating back from it, or otherwise inanely taking it and her into account. What did make a difference was that if they held back it must supposedly be she who checked them, she who kept Alan to his wretched bargain, who would not let him off, who could not be supposed to wish

herself well rid of him. What did make a difference was that if they did not hold back, if they had overstepped a line, it must be supposed that she had striven with all her little wits, with all her little graces and *chatteries*, to hold him, and had failed. His *was* a wretched bargain, the instant he chose to think it so. He had had a perfect right to expect her not to break her neck; at least not both to break her neck and to live. Even when he took her for better or for worse, he had a right, on any modest calculation, to believe the worst not so bad as that. The sheer blindness, or sheer *clairvoyance*, of a great passion apart, it was incredible, that if he could choose again, and choose with full knowledge, he would choose her. A mere passion of pity or honour apart, it was incredible that he would not think any one else in his shoes in hard luck. She did not wish the man who had married her to be in a position which he would regard as hard luck for any other man, and which any other man would regard as hard luck for him. She wished it least of all when she had reason to believe that the man who had married her regarded his position much as any other man would have regarded it. She analyzed it out, step by step, in the end: she wished the man who had married her to be regarded by every one, including himself, as the luckiest man alive, and she wished to find in him the passion which should be utterly indifferent as to whether every one or any one regarded him as lucky or not.

She had never thought that Alan's marriage with her would be regarded by every one, or even by people in

general, as the luckiest thing in the world for Alan ; but she had thought, and thought still, that she had found in him a passion utterly indifferent as to whether any one regarded him as lucky or not. It had never entered into her calculations that he had not lost his head about her, almost from the first moment he had seen her. He had not said anything in five words that definitely committed him, but she had not the least doubt what he meant. It is difficult, even for a girl born and bred in the States, to keep a constant possession of the fact that the man's tradition permits him to say every syllable he means and to dot every *i* he wishes dotted, and that if he has left a syllable unsaid, or an *i* undotted, the reason is that he has not wished to say that syllable or to dot that *i*. From the first, Alan certainly had "distinguished" her ; from the first, he had almost pursued her ; when she fled for Paris he had pursued her outright. In spite of her tears and her dropped eyelids and nervously clipped sentences at Estcourt, she had not been in the least fluttered or alarmed by Alan's distinguishing her or even by his pursuing her ; she had been alarmed only at the thought that she might yield to his pursuit. She had not sat in a studio to remain a conventual *jeune fille* ; she was a conventual *jeune fille* outside, because one's outside is one's language, and she could speak only as she had been taught to speak ; but she was not a *jeune fille* inside ; she was a lithe, alert little woman, who knew what she wanted and what she did not want, who had taken an accurate measure of her advantages and of her difficulties, and who had taken both into account in her reckon-

ing. She had wanted to be a painter of landscape; a great one if possible, but a devoted one at all events, devoted to that and to nothing else. She had surveyed the ground with her neat French intelligence, which is at once so much more unflinching than the English intelligence in a vision of what undeniably is and so much more unsuspecting than the English intelligence in a vision of what perhaps is and of what probably will be. Undeniably she delighted in her eyes, and in the skill in her fingers to record the delight of her eyes. She did not delight in an effort to become a leader of fashion, and neither her birth, nor her beauty, nor her fortune, justified an expectation of the sort of success that would be in itself a delight. There remained literature, for which she had no talent, and romance, in which she had no belief. The thing existed, she supposed, but as an intoxication, a brief madness, for which one paid. She did not want to be intoxicated; she did not want a period of madness, however delightful; she did not want to pay. She had thought it great fun that first day on the coach that Alan had liked her; she liked to be liked; she set no limit to how much. What had shattered her nerve on the day of the polo-game, had been the discovery that she not only liked to be liked, but that she liked Alan. There had been a half-hour in her walk with him afterwards, during which if he had asked her to marry him, she would have said "yes." He had not had the least notion during that walk of asking her to marry him; she knew that a moment after she had reached the house; but just that notion would come to him sooner or

later—the notion had started to come to him,—and the later it arrived, the less likely she would be to “get her own consent” to answer “no.” There had occurred to her but one defence, not against Alan but against herself, and that was flight. She had not been able to command the repose that would have been necessary to lay the whole situation as it was before Brigantine. Besides, there had been a number of points belonging to it in regard to which she had not cared to take him into her confidence. More than all, she had not been sure that, if he knew the plain unexaggerated truth, he would consent to an instant departure. What she had been sure of was that no matter what she insisted upon, she would get it if she gave no reasons. In this certainty the event had proved her right; she had lived almost a fortnight in a sense of triumph, not over Brigantine, but over fate, and Alan, and herself. When Alan had followed her she had been in despair.

She had felt a kind of pity for him and for herself, in her despair. His life, his own ambitious, separate life, as he had planned it, had not been inviolably his own. She had flung a hook and line, “bobber” and “sinker,” overboard unknowingly, she had hooked him against her will, she would land him if he did not at any cost break loose; she would cook him and eat him—with infinite relish!—if he gave her the chance; and he would give her the chance. Her life, her own ambitious, separate life, as she had planned it, had not been inviolably her own. He had flung a hook and line, “bobber” and “sinker,” overboard unknowingly, he had

hooked her against his will, he would land her if she did not at any cost break loose; he would cook her and eat her—with infinite relish!—if she gave him the chance; and she would give him the chance. It was not common sense, it was fate; it was not logic or consistency, it was fact; they were each fisher and fished; they were each cannibal and victim. He was simply a man like another, with a man's indomitable instincts; she was simply a woman like another, as idiotic as a milkmaid in a comic song, with slumbering dreams of bliss, sensibilities, what you will, that he, or any other *galant homme*, was at liberty to awaken without scruple or remorse. He was natural prey in the presence of his natural enemy; she was natural prey in the presence of her natural enemy. He would ask her to marry him, not because he wanted to, but because he could not help it; she would jump at the chance of marrying him, not because she wanted to, but because she could not help it; and they would both live long and unhappily afterwards. They had lost their eyes, they had lost their wits, they had eaten together of some intoxicating root, their brains were maddened with illusion, they would loathe each other, and themselves—when once they came to themselves. In the meantime, she proposed to make the most of his courtship; she would be hanged for a sheep, not for a lamb, if she was destined to be hanged at all; every drop of Latin blood in her determined her to that particular kind of shipwrecked hedonism and economy. In the dim retrospect of operas, “first-nights,” *tête-à-têtes*, that counted for her in the

Parisian winter festival; in the still day-lit hours, month after month, in her studio in the gay bright city by the Seine; in the long August days at the seaside, with the sunshine glinting in the softened summer air like a shower of gold; she set down every minute of his devotion to her as so much to the good, and waited, very peacefully, with her answer on her lips, for his question. It did not occur to her that his delay might be due to an inability to bring himself to pretend that he wanted what he did not, or to an instinct of respect to be shown some other woman, or to a sense of obligation to make decorously credible his wanting the gift for which he asked. Her flight had amounted at the least to a declaration that he had an obstacle to overcome; and she took his patience for an ominous precautionary circumspection, pressing forward with the light insistence which is a last confession of the greatness of the stake and of a relentless will to win. She found a charm in the idiom of chivalry with its unblushing exaggerations. She liked the measure and decorum of the lover's minuet, with its attitudes of reverence. She liked to be the most important person in the world. She liked in particular Alan's chaff which was half compliment, and his compliments which were half chaff.

He still spoke the pretty idiom of chivalry. He still practised the attitudes, the measure and decorum of the lover's minuet. She was still seemingly the most important person in the world. No doubt the idiom of chivalry, the attitudes and decorum, were become a mere foppery of etiquette. She liked to be, even if only

officially, the most important person in the world; in particular when the alternative was to be a person not important at all, except perhaps in a scattered clan of artists and connoisseurs, of whom few enough came to visit her. He had called her, no later than yesterday, his small magician of the brush, and told her that it was she who won the prizes in the great world, while he was the amateur who had not yet "arrived." Her things did win prizes; there was comfort at least in that. He still envied and reproached her hilariously; he accused her gayly of audacious stratagems to keep herself in the lead — of having even in the beginning drawn him to Paris and expressly kept him there that at the outset she might gain a prodigious start. He even told her from time to time, in an outburst of seeming sincerity and pleasure, how pretty she was. She knew how pretty she was: she was a thing to grimace at in the looking-glass. She kept a looking-glass in which to grimace at her ugliness, and to double it; at least she kept a looking-glass in which to drape her ugliness. Her pluck was real, whatever might be said of her prettiness; her pluck, yes! and her vanity. She had confessed it to herself that morning in her dressing-room; she confessed it an hour later, lingering over her breakfast and her mail. There was a letter to Alan that had been brought her by mistake among her own: he would kiss her finger-tips when she "chaffed" him about it and handed it to him: she had no wish to bring about the time when he would not offer to kiss her finger-tips.

XXXIII

WHEN Alan's engagement was announced, Isabel ought logically to have found herself without a reason for existence, and to have had her life to plan again. And she had been undisguisedly shocked; when Mrs. Windet gave her Alan's letter, she made no effort to conceal her dismay as she read; she handed the letter back with a face more full of trouble than Mrs. Windet had imagined her face could be. Mrs. Windet had long since pronounced Isabel hard and clean as a diamond. The man who married her, she said, would find among the live stock of the estate she brought him seven devils of obstinacy and pride. She had not said this because she disliked Isabel. Language seemed to her the most amazingly defective instrument in the world; the instant she described accurately what she cared for, the description was hateful. Cecil was intolerable, but all the adjectives which belonged to him were charming; Isabel was charming, but all the adjectives which belonged to her were intolerable. Mrs. Windet almost forgot her own vexation as she watched the girl's face. Isabel returned the letter without a word and left the room. In fifteen minutes she returned. She possessed indomitable pluck; which is to say, she was incapable of changing her plan of life; she did not possess imagination enough. She wanted what she wanted, simply.

She was an economist of the passions; she had invested too heavily to withdraw; in the *mauvais quart d'heure* in which she had been alone, she had simply balanced her account. She had estimated her losses up to date; she had had no notion, as her father would have said, of selling out.

"Isabel, you look like a vestal, a dedicated virgin, of resignation," Mrs. Windet said. "It is almost indecent; you ought to have more feeling for me. I am as full of rage and disappointment as a viper is of venom, only I have lost the habit of expressing rage and disappointment. I need some one else to express them for me; I am like the woman who had missed a train and who said 'Thank you, sir,' when a man near her, who had missed the train also, swore: 'My sentiments exactly, only infinitely better expressed.' I've a notion that the superiority of the male and the use of imprecations are intimately connected. A man in my case would say 'damn,' with variations, and find himself comforted. 'Damn' doesn't comfort me in the least; I am an inferior being. I want Alan to be happy, and that girl is as incapable of making him happy — as the girl, no doubt, I should have chosen for him — as you, my dear. The mystery of what makes a man happy!"

"I ought to pretend to be indignant at the things you take for granted, though I never discover that pretences deceive any one," said Isabel, grimly; "or else I ought to burst into tears and let you comfort me."

"Yes, you don't do what you ought, Isabel; that is one of the reasons why you are a dear; you are interest-

ing, you are unfeminine, inhuman; you are as unexpected and as verifiable as a natural phenomenon. I delight in you, Isabel; I should be pleased with you perfectly, if you did not please so many other people besides me, whom I cannot imagine any one that I like *really*, pleasing at all. You are all on the surface, and all of a piece, and therefore in contradiction with everything one knows of human beings, and the most mystifying creature alive."

Mrs. Windet smiled benignly on her own eloquence, which was also an audacity of tact: both she and Isabel found themselves diverted from the shock Alan's letter had brought them.

Isabel had not the least notion of allowing the conversation to dwell on her own peculiarities, and Mrs. Windet, happily, could be made to talk about anything whatever.

"I don't see that any one need concern himself about Alan's happiness; he has done as he likes, I suppose," she said.

"Isabel, really, you astonish me. Providence has arranged matters so that no one shall do as he likes. You and I would if we could, but we haven't the power. Cecil and Alan have the power, but they would not use it to save their souls. I beg your pardon for telling the plain truth, but they have each of them more scruples than there are mites in a cheese, and when they come together their scruples increase in geometrical progression. I don't know exactly what that means, but the result is appalling. Behold it!"

She spread out her perfect hand which Alan had found himself in conscience bound to compare to Cecily's.

"I don't see anything appalling in a man of ability's having an insignificant little girl for a wife. At least, if it is appalling, it is not conspicuously so; 'there are others.'"

"Isabel, I am sure 'there are others' is slang, and I'm not at all sure what it means. Nannie Brigantine is not an insignificant little girl. I don't know where people's eyes can be that they always speak of her in diminutives. She's as full of definite gifts as a little fairy, and as obstinate as a slipper that's too small for the foot. The foot will have to fit the slipper and take the pinch along with the prettiness. Alan is marrying her either because he wants to or because he doesn't want to; and in either case he will not care for the same things afterwards. When he comes back we shall not know him. That is a prophecy; I have been inspired."

"In either case he will not care for the same things," — the words impressed Isabel as a menace. They struck a spark of anger in her. Alan's marriage she could not prevent; she did not say to herself that she was mainly responsible for having brought the marriage about; she did not say to herself that she had blundered; the marriage was fate. The past was always fate in Isabel's world; the present and the future were always the field on which she concentrated her attention. It had not occurred to her that Alan's marriage might change him. It was the advantage of letting her aunt talk that she always said things which no one else would have brought out with

such definiteness of effrontery. Isabel did not wish Alan to change, to care for different things. She was slow enough in her perception of matters that did not concern herself. In things that did concern her she was quick to perceive the bearing of the lightest chance-dropped word. Alan should not change, if she could prevent it. The resolution was as immediate as the anger, and the plan followed fast behind. She excused herself and despatched a message to Urrey.

Urrey too had received a letter from Alan to much the same effect as the letter to Mrs. Windet. Urrey's first thought had been of Isabel and of her inevitable change of front. The promptness of her message, however, took him by surprise. He saw her of late every few days, and her sending for him might have nothing to do with the news from Alan. She had cut a dinner to make an appointment with him if possible, she telegraphed; would he dine that evening with her and Mrs. Windet? — a virginal euphemism, he rightly suspected, for dining with her and receiving excuses from Mrs. Windet. Her position in the house combined all the advantages without the disadvantages that a daughter would have had, and all the advantages without the disadvantages of a separate establishment. Both Cecil and Mrs. Windet wished her to stay at Estcourt; they had left her no excuse for setting up an establishment of her own. She for her own part had been glad to remain; she held a strategic position in the enemy's capital. The little courtesies that were involved in living in a house not her own, she, who delighted in saying things and doing things, because

she was conscious of saying them and doing them well, found less a burden than a pastime. She rode with Cecil in the morning. She made purchases for Mrs. Windet, made presents to both, kept both *au courant* with an infinity of gossip, on which she could comment shrewdly enough, when comment was a compliment to her listeners; she was an element of fresh life in the dead household. Cecil found her good to look at, and Mrs. Windet found her gowns good to look at, and both were pleased with her.

At her first word Urrey knew that his surmise had been correct. Alan's letter had produced its immediate effect of a change of front. But the change of front was the last in the world that he was prepared for.

"I sent you the telegram because we have received news to-day which has set us all in a flutter. Alan is to be married, and after that he is to return here. I dare say it is unbusinesslike to be in a flutter; but it is not unbusinesslike to see that his early return is just what we want. It is possible I shall go to the wedding; Aunt Bettie at least speaks of going to Paris as if the place were in Kamchatka. At all events we cannot begin to understand too soon what we are to do, you and I. I hope you have not been too much put out in coming here this evening? I know you don't object to talking business while you eat."

It was her tone more even than anything she said that prepared him for what was to follow. For a moment he was completely taken aback. After a moment he reflected that she had always completely taken him aback. He had always expected her to be something rather bad,

she had always proved to be admirable. His admiration and respect for her increased as the evening wore on. She was one of the unfortunate people who lead one to be on one's guard against the evil that is not in them. On reflection he found her the kindest and wisest woman he knew, and one of the most beautiful.

She plunged at once into the middle of her subject. She remembered a dozen little details about his preferences and repugnances at table, and provided for them currently, with assured prevision, without interruption of her speech or his. She gave without hesitation or girl-ish apology a curt exposition of things to be done, and of things to be guarded against. She put accurate questions. She asked him point blank whether she could rely on his answers, she received his corrections and suggestions with grave attention, she was a man of affairs in a *toilette de grande dame*, she was charming, in the end she was imposing. What she proposed was in effect an immediate action in Alan's name. She saw with a clearness for which Urrey gave her all credit, without too definitely recollecting that he himself had suggested it to her, that particular offices were beyond Alan's reach, but that the man who controls nominations and elections controls officers, and that the real governor in the States is not the choice of the people but the "boss" of the "machine." She proposed definitely, in Alan's absence, without consulting him, to make him, in an astonishing degree, boss of a portion of the machine.

"You 'commit' him in all manner of ways," said Urrey, half in objection, half in admiration of her audacity.

"Precisely what we want is to 'commit' him; to commit him so far that he cannot back out," she said quickly. "You know as well as I — better than I — what his absence this past nine months has meant for everything for which he cares. He has done his best, with his eyes open, to ruin himself. We must save him in spite of himself. He must find himself so deeply committed when he returns that he will have no choice."

"You seem to regard his marriage as an indiscretion," Urrey laughed.

"Oh — indiscretion!" she said, with the accent of a mental shrug of the shoulders; "he has cut his throat, *il s'est brûlé la cervelle*, he will be astonished to find himself alive. He is helpless; all the more reason that we, who know what he really wants, should help him."

XXXIV

SHE had said before that, no matter whom he married, his wife should envy her. She proposed to help him, and in helping him to take and to keep possession of him; not, she satisfied her conscience by assuring herself, as a woman might by cajoleries and flatteries, but as a man might by interests and labours in common. What a man might do blamelessly she would not blame herself for doing: this at least was what she was prepared to say if she were challenged: if the defence could not be made to cover all her conduct, so much the worse. Alan had found on his return an almost hourly need of seeking information from her, of consulting her, of keeping her instructed in regard to his movements and intentions; all of which he had done, at first with hilarity, and then with a businesslike gravity. And the need did not cease. Urrey had a free hand with the *Chronicle*, but only on condition that she should know beforehand detail by detail what he proposed to do; and neither Urrey nor Alan found it any longer possible to deal directly with Peyton; Isabel's agents could be moved only through her. When Alan had attempted to deal with them directly, he was told that he would have to see Miss Windet. When he remonstrated with her on the inconvenience of that arrangement, "The arrangement suits me; you will have to put up with it," she said

coolly. And then, laughing: "I've a part interest in the horse; I propose to know what goes on in the stables." She proposed in effect that he should take her seriously, and forced him to do so.

But whatever her notion in the beginning had been of confining herself to the line a man might take blamelessly enough, inevitably her wishes strayed from it, and a wish with Isabel was an impulse with nothing but an uncertainty of ways and means to hold it in check. She was an Italian of the fifteenth century; she was a *condottiere*; with her lucid untrammelled intelligence for outer fact, and with her inner barbarian simplicity. She was as incapable of self-analysis as a child; she wanted things, and studied how to get them; whether they would be worth the effort when they lay in her hand, whether she would not be quite as content without them, whether she would not be quite as content if she gave herself up to wanting something else, were questions that never occurred to her. Her aims were ultimates, first come first served, with precipitation, with tenacity, with infinite subtlety, with infinite impatience, with infinite industry. She was happy because she was doing things, she was in a fever of exasperation because the things were not done. Done to her liking, she would have been in a fever of exasperation about something else. She did not want Alan to caress her: she wanted him to belong to her, definitively; she wanted guarantees for the future; she wanted that he should not belong to any one else. More than all the rest, she wanted companionship; she was miserably lonely. By actual count of

waking hours she passed perhaps as much time with him as if she were his wife; but the hours she passed with him were hours in which she need in no case have been solitary. She was lonely at the end of the day; the thought of mounting to her own rooms filled her with a sickness of horror, and the door once locked behind her the horror deepened. The thought that he was not under the same roof with her, filled her with rage.

By six months after Alan's return she had been so long in possession of what almost immediately on Alan's return she had found it possible to grasp, she had been so long unable to grasp more, that her exasperation was extreme. In the beginning she had hoped with a cynical frankness that Nannie would not live. She was not to be daunted by conventions of speech; she knew, she assured herself, scores of people who had made their calculations on some one's not living. Apart from the accident which had maimed her, Nannie's wasted face, the confinement to which she subjected herself, her feverish alertness and industry, inevitably suggested that she could not live. And yet Isabel put small faith in the suggestion, or in her hope. There was a fund of passion and energy in Nannie, and a gift of sarcasm, that confounded Isabel. She saw no reason why Nannie should find life tolerable; in feminine logic she should commit suicide, unless indeed she was too *dévôté*. Only, people with a gift for sarcasm could endure anything; Nannie would live forever, no matter what happened to her, Isabel reflected bitterly; she would make a dozen unpleasant phrases, and go back to her painting, occu-

pied, tranquil, not happy perhaps, but resigned. Isabel hated sarcasm and phrases, and hated still more resignation; she felt herself helpless in their presence. And she estimated Nannie's "devotion" by her own. Isabel was a scrupulous churchwoman because to be a churchwoman is good form; in particular to be an Episcopalian. Nannie, to be sure, was a Catholic, and even had a private chapel in the Pavilion, in which there were sometimes masses said. Isabel thought it rather *chic* to be a Catholic.

It was no part of her disposition, however, to rest in despair, or to refrain from attempting the seemingly impossible. She had small faith in her ability to bring Nannie literally to despair, but she attempted it; almost inadvertently, instinctively, at first; afterwards with a passionate astuteness and forethought. From the beginning she had taken pains to be full of delicate courtesies to Nannie. She sent her flowers almost daily, she visited her with assiduity, she made Nannie chatter, she went errands for her, she made herself so far as possible indispensable. Nannie had not lent herself at all readily to Isabel's friendship; Isabel had had full opportunity to test Nannie's gift for sarcasm; but with an end in view she was capable of a contemptuous endurance. She had accustomed both Nannie and Alan to allow her to make each a subject of conversation with the other by pouring out praises of each to the other. From praises she had advanced to over-praises, to praise in the wrong place, to praise for the wrong things, to which her listener could in honesty give no assent, or but a faint assent, and to which no assent or a faint assent

was an adverse criticism. Finally she began to drop with an accent of admiration little observations in regard to tricks of manner and speech, little reports of things said and done, which she knew her listener would detest. Here Alan had sharply pulled her up.

"Isabel, I wish you would drop Nannie out of your talk to me," he said, cutting across her first words; "you can have nothing unpleasant to say of her; and if you had, I should not listen to it. As for the pleasant things—"

"You know them already! Very good, Mr. Bluebeard."

"Yes, I know a great deal more about the pleasant things than you can. I suppose I ought to say that no one can wish to hear a charming woman like my cousin Isabel talk of any one but herself, though that was not the way I intended to finish my sentence. It simply is not the man's tradition to encourage any one to talk to him about his wife."

"Tradition of the hareem and of the domestic tyrant, and everything my gentle cousin Alan does not believe in," said Isabel.

"I think it is rather plainly a tradition of delicacy and—reverence, which you would expect a man who loved you to give you the full advantage of. At all events, the tradition suits me, as you would say, down to the ground."

Nannie had no such tradition to interpose between herself and Isabel, though it is difficult to see how it is less unkind to a man to listen to injurious speech about him than it is to a woman to listen to injurious speech about her. Nannie listened, and could even be made to reply. It never entered her head that she was playing the part

of a little traitress, — that she was abandoning the outer defences of her life and Alan's, that she was betraying a trust. Her military education had been neglected; she had no conception of hostility. She knew all about gusts of passion, bursts of insanity quickly held in check; she guessed even the lengths to which they might go if they were not held in check; but of deliberate calculated malice, of the anger that burns from day to day, of the enmity that plans beforehand and watches for an opportunity, she had no idea, and no discipline in the conventions that would have served her instead of ideas. Nannie was gifted to her finger-tips; she was intelligent; in every atom of her she was good; but she was naïve with the eternal naïveté of every one from whom the worst that has been said and thought and done in the world has been concealed. She was as incapable of understanding Isabel and her reasoned malevolence as if she and Isabel had belonged to different "civilizations," to different epochs of history, as in truth they did. She was for the most part concerned to conceal the pain that Isabel's revelations brought her. Both her listening and her comments were dictated by the wish to conceal her pain; and after all, if what Isabel reported was true! It did not occur to her to doubt that what Isabel reported was exactly, least of all that it was in effect, true. Isabel had possessed from the beginning the infinite advantage of dealing with a person to whom she and her world and her purposes were simply inconceivable. She had exploited the advantage to the utmost. She had at first confined herself to what was literally accurate. Then with an instinc-

tive appreciation of the lack of some faculty of criticism in Nannie, she had allowed herself, cautiously, to invent things in regard to which, if challenged, she could allege a plausible mistake. In the end, with a complete contempt of the intelligence of the woman she had to deal with, she had given her imagination free rein. It was intolerable to be cautious with a fool. Nannie's pain, in spite of her devices for concealment, was only too plain. To Isabel's mind it lent her whole procedure some justification, it certainly heightened her anger, that the creature who stood in her path was so futile. In itself Nannie's pain gave Isabel no satisfaction, but it suggested to her an opportunity.

One stupidity of Nannie's Isabel found especially vexatious; Nannie could be made to doubt whether Alan was really devoted to her at present; her illusion about his devotion to her in the beginning seemed indomitable. It was intolerable to Isabel—in the long run, unimaginable—she could keep no hold of the idea—that she should possess a weapon perfectly suited to her purpose and should not use it. It was unimaginable that she should stand defeated when four words would in all probability give her a victory. To utter the four words would be an infamy; but infamy was purely a matter of the outer world; she could console her conscience with a shrug. "There are others," she would have said, and lost herself in a contemplation of her substantial gains. The difficulty about the four words that trembled on her tongue was that she could not utter them without outer infamy. Alan was a man whom one must serve in his own way or not

at all. He might proclaim as often as he chose his love of vulgarity; when one had said he was Cecil Windet's son, one had defined him. Isabel did not need to feel his scruples herself to know that they were there. Beneath all his lightness of speech he was a man of decorums and æsthetic formulas. No one could count on what he would say, but every one could count on what he would do, and on the judgment he would pass on people like herself. The instant she showed herself as she was, he would neither forget nor forgive; it was because she knew that in effect he loathed her as she was that he dominated her. It was a foregone conclusion that she must either hate him or love him, and chance had determined, before she knew either him or herself, that she should love him. If he had loved her in return, she might have been a good woman.

She did not utter her four words; she confined herself to hinting at them. She played about inadvertent disclosure. In her indignation at Nannie's obtuseness, she sometimes went so far she was afraid that, if she were put on her defence, the plea of inadvertence might lack the convincing plausibility she wished it to possess. In the end she feared she should be reduced to the gross stratagem of setting down what she wished Nannie to know in a letter—to some one else—and of writing Nannie a kind little note, *à propos* of nothing, or of a gift, or an errand, which it would be a pleasure to have shown, and of confusing the envelopes. She had even written the letter, but could think of no one to whom she could have any conceivable excuse for sending it.

XXXV

LATER in the morning of the day when Nannie had watched Isabel and Alan ride away, Isabel entered Nannie's work-room, bringing a basket of flowers.

"Narcissus and lilies for the bronzed green vases, the coiled serpents. Those are for you — purity and wisdom. Jonquils for the brown Rookwoods with the enamelled yellow roses. These are for me — because I am jealous both of your talents and your innocence. The long stems that look cool this hot day are for both of us," said Isabel, taking out the flowers in masses and distributing them. "In spite of my lack of talents, however, I am become a person of importance. I know it because I can stand hot weather. Have you noticed that only persons of importance can endure hot weather? Every one else is obliged to go to the mountains or the seaside. Besides, I saw in a newspaper this morning, not the *Chronicle*, that I am a person of importance. I shall be punished after death by being exposed villanously done in bronze, on a pedestal, in a modern dress, and shall have a public school named after me. There — now I am ready."

Isabel was lithe and strong, light on her feet, supple and definite in her movements. It was a delight to see her turn about the room. And she was fresh and cool as the stems of the flowers she brought; it was a delight to

see her sitting quiet in a chair. What she was ready for was to give Nannie a "sitting." Nannie had said she did not want to make a portrait; what she had not said was that she wished to put more of what she saw in Isabel than a portrait of her at the moment would hold. The autobiography is not recorded in the face in the twenties as decisively as Nannie wished to see it set down. She could perceive more things in Isabel than she could understand, and the things she perceived had interested her. She had made three heads in clear colours, side by side on a gold panel, and the faces were all Isabel's and not Isabel's, kinswomen of hers, ancestresses possibly. In each case the hair was drawn back from the brows and covered with a network of brilliant jewels, in the fashion of the fifteenth century — amethysts and pearls, garnets and pearls, emeralds and pearls; and the three faces looked out and down on one, dominant, hardy, eager, subtle, inscrutable, strong and false, cold and alive, and beautiful.

"You have made me very good to look at," said Isabel, critically, "the beautiful age, which is no age in particular; and *ces dames* are all women 'of importance'; but I would not trust them alone with a jockey if they had money on his race. Do I look like that? They are not women of to-day. To be sure they have no coquetry. Coquetry perished with paint and patches, with prettiness, artificial and otherwise, which was the life of it. The woman of to-day is a Brunnhilde; she rides and shoots; she has rights; at a pinch, she can be eloquent, and even audacious — with fewer screams and tears than

are to be expected in the catastrophe. We have no more mortuary graces; we do not pride ourselves on an interesting pallor. We pride ourselves on eating a pound of meat for breakfast. Our mammas were vegetarian and languishing; we are carnivorous. Why did you want me for a model?"

Nannie was already busy with her work.

"Because you are beautiful, Isabel; because you are terrible; because there are a lot of things in you that you know nothing about; because you are full of contradictions and are incredible — impossible," said Nannie; "I dream of you at night; at least I dream of you in the daytime; I had to paint you to get rid of you."

"I am simplicity itself," affirmed Isabel, surprised into honesty.

"That is what is interesting," said Nannie, pursuing her work and reciting her analysis; "you are all of a piece, as Alan's mamma says; you are also infinitely manifold; you are real; you are impossible. Chin a little lifted, please, to bring out the malice in the lips and eyes. I shall discover some day that you never existed. I don't believe in you, because I cannot put you together. I record you, as I have said, as a dream, as a nightmare, for the society for psychical research. What you say and what you look do not go together; I mean what you look in the pauses between the things you say. I can never tell what you are thinking about. I know only that you are not thinking about the things you say."

This was what Isabel meant by Nannie's stupidity; she was intellectually helpless, for all her talent, in the

presence of hints, innuendoes, and lies. Nannie had too much pride of imagination to take refuge in so simple an hypothesis as that of mere enmity or of mere falsehood; she could always labour to conceive a more ingenious explanation.

"You don't like me, do you?" said Isabel, in a tone that took the answer for granted. "It is rather strange; I have always been rather nice to you. I have known for a long time, even before you made a picture of it in those heads, that you did not like me; but I have kept on coming, because I wanted to, and because I fancied you wanted me to. One finds people one dislikes more interesting sometimes than people one likes; for instance, this talk about yourself and me interests you immensely, apart even from the fact that it gives you fresh points for those faces."

She did not speak with an accent of pain or resentment; there was no appeal to Nannie to deny or to protest out of mere kindness. Isabel was simply stating a curious fact, in which she was impersonally interested. Nannie stared at her wide-eyed, and laughed for pleasure at the things she saw.

"You are the best fun in the world, Isabel. No, I do not like you; at least I don't know whether I do or not; I daresay the reason is that I do not know whether you like me. It seems to me so great a demerit in any one not to like me, that I cannot overlook it. On the other hand, to like me very much, though in itself easy, normal, natural, almost inevitable, a proof of the merest lack of the extremes of wickedness and insensibility, is

in a manner an evidence of all the virtues, or at a pinch a substitute for them. You are nice to me; that is you go through the motions; but do you feel nice to me? You come to see me; that is you go through the motions; but do you come to see *me*? *Me, me*, the wonderful and delightful me, from whom it is a privation to stay away? I don't know; I have even my doubts; at moments when my doubts are strongest, I estimate your wickedness accordingly; and being a creature not of passion but of judgment, I find it impossible to like any one who is so wicked as that."

Isabel understood simple irony; it consisted in saying one thing and in meaning something different; it was often comforting as a relief to the malevolent passions, suggesting a contrast, and in lighter matters was an ornament of speech. But double irony, in which one said more things than one, and meant all of them, and didn't mean any of them, she found confusing. She hated it: Nannie seemed to be laughing for the most part at herself. Isabel never laughed at herself, and dismissed the notion that any woman could as improbable. In the meantime, Nannie had told her in a form she could not openly resent that she had long known Isabel was her enemy, that she thought Isabel a hypocrite ever to have pretended to be anything else, and that she held Isabel so cheap that she could afford to laugh in her face. Isabel dotted Nannie's *i*'s with a vigour that obliterated them. Isabel was not made indignant by her reading of Nannie's delicate fun; she regarded it as a fresh instance only of Nannie's invincible stupidity.

"You don't like Alan, either; I have watched for a long time the way you speak of him and to him. That also seems to me rather strange; he too has always been nice to you. I have always wondered why you made him marry you."

Isabel was still, to judge from her accent, merely stating curious facts in which she was impersonally interested. She spoke of Nannie and Alan, as she had spoken of Nannie and herself, objectively, as people she and her listener knew by name, but with whom they had no concern. She had devoted a great deal of meditation to the choice of this accent. She had selected it with as absolute a sense of discrimination as she could have had in choosing the colour of a hat or the decorations of a room. She found it quite as non-committal as the accent of inadvertence, of agitation, of anger, and much more decent; she found it also more applicable to a complete statement. She might have lost her temper in four words, but she could not decently lose it in a hundred; and she wanted Nannie to hear a hundred.

"Made him marry me!—the words you manage to choose. I suppose I did make him marry me, the poor dear, as also I dislike him, in his cousin Isabel's fancy. I was eager to marry; I could not fill the day without a husband; I have learned to fill it without one, but only since I was married. Chin always a little lifted, please, to bring out the malice in the lips and eyes: I'm sorry to fatigue you. He was not eager to marry; he was eager only to make me think he was eager; and I jumped at the chance. And you are an indolent

inquisitioner who beguile the ennui of a sitting by making me, disinterested confessions and asking me disinterested questions. Chin always a little lifted."

Isabel thought Nannie the devil in person, and was not dismayed. She continued in the same impersonal tone.

"Of course you did not make him follow you to Paris; it was the row that my Uncle Cecil made which forced him to follow you; of course you knew all about that. He was in love with Mrs. Lidcott at the time; I have always wondered what happened afterward."

"A row with Mr. Windet? — tell me about that."

"I don't know that I ought to, if you do not know. I supposed you knew," said Isabel.

"Never mind what I know, or what you supposed. A row with Mr. Windet presents itself to the imagination as amusing; it ought to have details that are inexpressible; I have heard one narrative; I want to hear another, more complete; the chin always lifted, please."

Isabel lifted her chin a little and told all she knew, in the form of a narrative. Nannie painted. Her mind had travelled a long way before she answered.

"So it is that that for some months, some years even, you have wished to tell me and have been trying to tell me. I said a few minutes ago that I never knew *au fond* whether I liked you or not. Well, I know now; I like you very much; and I do not like you at all. What you have wished to tell me, I knew long ago."

XXXVI

It was, of course, not true that Nannie had known one syllable of what Isabel told her. Nannie's standard of veracity, speaking within the bounds of reason, was high. There were some small matters relating to declarations at the custom-house, and before census agents, in which she favoured diplomacy, but the guilt in such cases she regarded as wholly on the side of the government. In the present instance she admitted to herself that she had told a lie. She was not ashamed of it; she regarded it as an excellent lie; she would have thought of it with a certain sense of triumph, if she had not been in too great pain. She had been living in a ruined house; she had long known that; but it had given her shelter. Isabel had quietly, with a businesslike absence of protestations and prolixities, razed it to the ground. She was grateful to Isabel for sparing her the protestations and prolixities; but she needed the shelter; she was in despair when Isabel left her. It did not occur to her to struggle or be indignant; she had some measure of Brigantine's helplessness and resignation in the presence of accomplished facts. The quick, clear little intelligence that nourished her ironies of speech pleaded Isabel's case and Alan's quite as eloquently as her own. She was not indignant with Isabel; she gave Isabel credit for a long

forbearance. She was not indignant with Alan; she gave him credit for a long, self-sacrificing courtesy; her bitterness toward him was gone. She could as little blame Isabel for using her beauty and strength as she could blame herself for using her fingers; every one to his own little talent, and the battle to the strong. She might fancy that if she possessed Isabel's beauty and strength she would use it less ruthlessly than Isabel, but the fancy ended in a shrug of self-mockery. She would doubtless have used Isabel's gifts if she had had them; she never had possessed a gift, at least, which she had let lie idle. More than all, Isabel and her world and what she wanted were actual, they existed, they were so many facts; she herself and her world and what she wanted were not facts, they were conventions, illusions, make-believe, a fool's paradise, and a torment to any one not a fool. Nannie did not shed tears; she passed in review all the items which confirmed Isabel's narrative, and passed upon herself the judgment of a hostile outsider for not having seen their import long since, and touched and retouched Isabel's picture.

Later in the morning Mrs. Windet paid Nannie a visit. Nannie was already looking at the not unkindly world around her with a stranger's eyes, and seeing in it more plainly hour by hour a world of make-believe. Mrs. Windet talked of the Far East, about which she knew what she had read in a book and a newspaper, and of mignonettes, about which she knew less than her gardener. She told an anecdote that had just come to her about a blunder on the part of Mrs. Archdale's butler, and

a retort made by Mr. Denslow's valet; anecdotes which being concerned with the butler and valet of people of importance were important anecdotes; the fun of a blunder and the wit of a retort being proportional to the dignity of the world in which they occur. She suggested for a gown of Nannie's a brooch of a pattern for which Nannie could make a design which she would have excuted as a birthday gift; it being impossible to make Nannie pleasant to the eyes, it was indispensable to try. Nannie wondered what justification there was for the existence of a woman like Mrs. Windet. She had heard a great deal since she came to the States of the sovereignty and dignity of womanhood. If that meant that inevitably, or probably, because she was a female, a woman possessed some superiority or dignity, some mystic metaphysical excellence, that made her existence, like that of a precious object, a justification for itself,—Nannie for her own part was unaware of anything of the kind. She thought the probabilities wholly the other way about. The sovereignty of womanhood in the States she understood to be an outer verifiable fact, very much to the credit of the gentleness and unselfishness of the men, and, in the majority of cases, very little creditable to their intelligence. The dignity of womanhood she understood to be to face the world with something like the "male" virtues, with so much less natural vigour than a man's to back one up. She was loyal enough to the gallantry of that. Mrs. Windet had made her remarks on the Far East with infinite lightness and spirit; she had been almost poetic, with a touch of

humour, on the subject of mignonette; she had told her little anecdotes with a perfect point and grace; the brooch she suggested would be charming; and she was a dear to take the trouble to come; but when all was said she was an expensive, almost a frivolous, institution for the production of just that. She gave a certain ease and beauty to life no doubt—like a footman; she was a seraphic flunky; it was her function to show on proper occasions, not her calves, but her comely neck and arms, and to be gracious to guests. She had been a bad wife; there had been difficulties placed in her way, Nannie was willing to suppose; but it is one's business to overcome the difficulties in one's profession. She had been a bad mother—at least not a good one; it was ridiculous to suppose that Alan's breeding had occupied a respectable amount of her anxiety, intelligence, and time; and at all events a mother with but one child could as little "stand pat" on her accomplishment as an artist with one statue, or with one picture, or an author with one book. She had been a bad human being; she had not even been happy. Cecil, too, dropped in later in the day. He, too, could make himself agreeable when he chose, and he had always chosen to make himself agreeable to Nannie. He made her pretty, punctilious compliments; he always regretted when he must go away; his visits were as courtly and old-fashioned—as welcome and as *connus*—as a minuet. He too, no doubt, had been a bad husband, but he had at least been something else: a good administrator of his property. He had at least seen straight where that was concerned. There were other matters in

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which she fancied he had never seen things as they were in his life; in which he had deliberately refused to see. The sheer folly and cruelty of refusing to see anything! Nannie was sick of the fool's paradise, and of the conventions and courtesies that make its existence possible.

Late in the afternoon Alan came, the fool's paradise in person, to find her still at work. He laughed when he entered — a little laugh of friendship and comfort. "You dear, you look like a little fairy in a bower where it is always afternoon," he said, coming behind her and taking her head in his hands and kissing her. "Drop your wand, which is polite for a dauby, smelly brush, and talk to me." There was not one forced note in his speech; there was not one artificial touch in his manner; though his manner was worn, — worn to the bone, Nannie said inwardly, — not as if he were weary of her, but as if the day had gone ill with him. She wondered at him that he had so long been able to keep it up. She was grateful to him for the resolution it must have cost him.

He lifted her from her seat to an easy chair by the window looking out on lawn and trees and a glimpse of river between. She could have walked nimbly enough, with the aid of crutches, to the window, but she hated to walk when any one was present, and he long since had divined this, and spared her when he could; and she was grateful to him for that also. He sat opposite her, "chaffing" her for her diligence — "a diligent lily, an enormity in nature, cursed with ambition, who, with the wisdom of Solomon to the contrary, would obstinately both toil and spin."

"If you did not shame me, I should make myself a lap-dog, a 'tame cat,' the sacramental phrase is, and live at ease off your labours, purring indulgently from time to time, when you were especially good to me, and showing my claws when you were not. It is the ancientest and therefore the most respectable male tradition to decline to do anything but hunt and fight, and to leave industry to the women. I feel the tradition strong in me every morning when I have to get out of bed and get into a tub. Tubbing and commerce have been the fall of man, and the rise of woman; they show no aptitude for either. You are still doing a Last Judgment of Isabel. It is capital, but if I were Isabel I would put a palette-knife through the canvas; or rather at my next sitting I would bring a hatchet and split the board. You have too obviously motioned her to the left of the judgment seat!"

He spoke with an affectionate gayety, looking at her out of the kindest eyes in the world. Did he imagine he could keep that up forever? Apparently he did; apparently he could. He had been good to her. They had all been good to her — in their way.

His raillery did not make it easy for her to begin. She had replied to it indeed in the same tone, and some measure of the accent of raillery tinged her next words. Nannie had pluck.

"Alan, if I wished to be separated from you," she said, "would you let me go?"

"Never in the world; you are not one of the women one lets go; I should summon my dignity as a male, and

stand on—what is the ironical word for it?—‘my rights.’ It makes such a pleasant household when some one is standing on his rights. Besides, you are separated from me eternally as paradise is from—well!—one of the minor planets.”

He was laughing, and a little laughing at her.

“I am serious, Alan,” she said, speaking seriously; “I know ‘everything.’ Everything that I did not know until this morning. I have been very happy here, but I could not be happy to stay. No; it is not a time for lies; I have not been happy. You have been perfect to me, but I have missed something; I did not know what. I do know what, and should miss it still more. I am sorry to pitch this at you without warning, but I am not good at breaking ‘bad news,’ even when I have my doubts whether the news is wholly bad.”

He saw at a glance that the time was not propitious for lies.

“You speak as if the end of the world had come,” he said. “Who has been talking to you? What has he, or she, said? It would seem I have a right to know.”

“The end of the world has come—*c’est bien ça, simple-ment*. It does not make any difference who has been talking to me. I was sure to put things together sooner or later. I had put them together already. You must not take me for an imbecile with a little talent, to astonish the barbarians; you must not pretend that you do not understand; *chansons que tout cela*. You must answer me two questions, unless you are content to leave them unanswered. Would you ever have followed me to Paris

but for the things your father said to you, and but for the things papa said to him? And in Paris, when you asked me to marry you, would you have been pained if I had refused?"

He did not answer the questions; he rose from his chair.

"You are simply the most amazing creature in the world," he said; "I should like to light a cigarette."

"Thank you," she returned, "as I said, it is not a time for lies. We have had enough lies. You may light a cigarette."

He took a turn about the room, and came back to her. He lifted her hand and kissed it, and resumed his seat.

"I am sorry you have been unhappy," he said; "I meant you never to have known any of this; it is a pity. It looks very much, as you say, like the end of the world."

It was she who was master of the situation; his face was full of grave trouble and perplexity. And again she was grateful to him, for not protesting, for taking her at once seriously.

"It is the end of the world, and a new world is just beginning,—not a bad one, I should say. You have nothing to reproach yourself with; you have been perfect to me,—more so than I should have thought possible."

He tossed his cigarette out of the window.

"You are a big woman, Nan, dear; but there are some things you left unlearned this morning when you learned everything. I am sorry to be so uncomplimentary and to destroy your illusion. This is not the end of the world, nor the beginning of another. No one ever has a fresh

chance—neither you nor I. One takes one's shot, and the result is what it is, and one abides by it. And our shot has not been so bad. You know about how often the great loves come. Can you fill the fingers of one hand with the list of your acquaintance to whom a great love has come? Can you even name one? And great loves apart, there is nothing better to be looked for anywhere than tranquil friendship—the love of respect and of use and wont. We have got that, Nan; both of us; we should be fools to throw it away; we can be decent, if we can't be ecstatic. With this thing that you have felt between us out of the way, you can be happier; we can be just the best friends in the world; indeed, we are just the best friends in the world. We could not have sat here talking like this, if we were not."

"It is no use, Alan, dear," she said; "you simply force me to dot my *i*'s. You love your cousin Isabel."

A gleam of fun came into his eyes; for the first time he saw light.

"Upon my honour, you never were more mistaken in your life; I see everything in Isabel that you have put in those three heads."

This was a check in mid-course; Nannie lost some of her mastery.

"Isabel loves you," she said.

"Nannie, there has been no way invented in which a man may receive a statement like that and not look a perfect ass. I don't want to be perfect in that kind; I don't receive the statement at all. You are not in Isabel's confidence and are in no position to make it; and if you

were, it has nothing to do with the case. Isabel must take her luck as she finds it, like the rest of us."

"That is just what she will not do," said Nannie.

"That is just what she will have to do. She will plunge and balk and she may hurt some one, but in the end she will take the bit, and it will not be a snaffle. But we were not talking about Isabel. It seems to me that latter-day prediction of yours was a mistake."

She looked at him a long while before she answered.

"Yes, it was a mistake. We are just the best friends in the world. Only I shall hold myself free to go away if it ever seems to me best. I don't mean that I should feel free to fly out the window on a broomstick."

"You have always been free to do anything you really wish, and to count on me to help you; there has never been a time when you did not know that," he said.

"And I shall hold you free, perfectly," she added.

Alan stared at her an instant, and then laughed.

"Thanks — for holding me free to play the giddy garden goat. That is a liberty I shall not abuse."

XXXVII

ALAN had not sought to force Nannie's confidence in regard to her informant in the matter of the circumstances of his courtship and marriage. He had indeed no need to do so; though that was not what prompted his respect for her reticence. Her informant could be but one of three persons, and his mother and Cecil were out of the question. Naturally, in making this inference by elimination, he was taking a risk of doing Isabel an injustice; but he lived by taking such risks, and finding them justified; he heartened himself with a homely negro epigram: faint heart never won a turkey at a raffle. Before Nannie's grave assertion, "You love your cousin Isabel," it had not occurred to him how deeply Isabel had intrenched herself in his life, nor how deeply wounded Nannie might be by finding Isabel constantly in his company.

"This is our last ride together for some time; let us make it a gallop," he said to Isabel the next morning as they were setting out; "I find my day so full that I cannot squeeze a ride into it unless I squeeze something of more consequence, mainly sleep, out of it. I have had so little sleep of late that break-of-day has come to seem to me the fall of man, and lying abed — infinite, endless lying abed — the highest human con-

ception of heaven. I would trade a harp and a halo against a four-poster any night, with a seraphically good conscience."

They had their gallop, because Isabel wanted time in which to meditate. She was the last woman in the world to decline to defend herself because no one had accused her. A refusal to accuse her openly, when one had accused her secretly, was just a stratagem to deprive her of an opportunity of defence. She had never found other people able or willing to give a better account of her than she could give of herself. She found other people, when they were well disposed, singularly lacking in imagination. When they were ill disposed, she found them singularly gifted in imagination.

"I owe you an apology," she said, when the horses had come to a walk in a colonnade of black-walnut trees; "Nannie turned the conversation yesterday on the circumstances of your marriage, and I let things drop about which perhaps I should have held my tongue. The things I said were perfectly innocent in themselves, but Nannie seemed to think they meant more than it had occurred to me they could to any one."

"You supply me with a bit of information of which I was much in need," said Alan. "I was not sure who had spoken to Nannie; I was sure only that she had been needlessly troubled; I was sure only that she had been told what is not true."

"Oh come, what I told her was true!" said Isabel, indignant.

"Was it? What you told her was a matter about my

own feeling, in regard to which I have never spoken one word to you, or to any one else."

Isabel found nothing to reply to this, and the two rode on for a minute in silence.

"Even if it had been true," Alan pursued, "the truth was one which belonged to me as absolutely as my stocks and bonds. A man's relations to his wife are of infinitely more consequence than his stocks and bonds, and so long as he is dealing honestly by her, you had better steal his stocks and bonds out of his safe than thrust on her your guesses and vague surmises. Of course, I have not dealt with you so long since my return without knowing that you stick at nothing to gain a point. I have seen it in you a hundred times, Isabel; the end justifies the means; all's well that ends well — for you. Nothing, so far as I can help it, will end well for you, if you do not let Nannie alone."

"There is no need to speak to me as if you loved her," Isabel said, with suppressed passion; "why do you choose me out of all the world to be brutal to? There is no one else who has done for you what I have. There is no one else who has been so good to you, and has asked so little. There is no one else who has so deserved your kindness; and I need your kindness as no one else does. And you pick me out as the sole person to whom you are unkind. You are not generous; you are not just."

A movement of indignation took possession of Alan as he listened. He was tempted to tell Isabel some plain facts about herself. He was tempted also to make her

the purely academic reply, that all the decency in life depends on one's doing the things that are expected of one. But he was less disposed to give academic reasons than to act on them. In the end he looked at Isabel with a kind of wonder.

"Isabel, I have seen a good deal of your audacity, and guessed a good deal that I have not seen; but the tone of that last speech of yours is simply stupendous. You strike me with amazement and admiration. You know perfectly who is to blame for what you call my unkindness."

"Myself, I presume," said Isabel, bitterly.

"I was sure you knew," said Alan.

"I do not know; least of all do I know why."

"I beg your pardon, you perfectly know why. I wish to mind my own business. You wish to mind it for me. You assure me that that is very good of you. Possibly that is true. You assure me that I ought to be grateful to you. Possibly I ought; but I don't think so. I don't think it is good of you to wish to mind my business for me, because I don't believe you fancy for a moment that I wish you to mind it for me. You knew the other day as well as you know now that you were doing a thing that I should detest. You did it quite regardless of whether I should detest it or not."

It was no part of Isabel's plan to quarrel with Alan. It crossed her mind that she would find it a comfort to strangle Nannie, and that Alan was almost infernally keen. He was the only human being, except her father, whom she had found it difficult to masquerade before.

She liked him for that; she hated him for that; as she had liked and hated Preston Windet. She was angry. Alan was a fool with his scruples and conventions. For an instant she could have lashed him across the face with her whip. He was Alan the son of Cecil. He was a puppy with his eyes shut. There would never be anything so difficult for him to see as the fact that stared him in the face. All conceit apart, she was a hundred times more worth while than Nannie, and a thousand times more worth while for him; a thousand times more devoted to him. She stood on her merits. If he had had any eye for merits, he would have chosen her before any woman in the world. He must choose her before any woman in the world, if he could once be got to choose at all. The trouble with him was that he did not choose; he let circumstances choose for him; "any old circumstance." She had no patience with him. She had infinite patience with him. He was all sorts of an idiot, but he was Alan, — he was her Alan. He belonged to her; at least, she belonged to him.

"It seems the privilege of kinship," she said, laughing, "to listen to nasty things. You really are hard on me, Alan. It would be just as easy to be nice. I never in my life did anything willingly that I thought would displease you."

Alan was still on his guard. He regarded this speech as an audacity almost surpassing its predecessor.

"If you were as deft with your foil as you are with your tongue, no man would be safe before you with the buttons off," he said. "I am perfectly aware that at

the moment we are fencing with the buttons off. The right that kinship gives to say nasty things is the indispensable defence — the one effective *parade* — for the thrusts against one's life that kinship makes possible. You might as well be frank; you knew that you were displeasing me. You knew that you were outraging me."

Isabel meditated this statement for some seconds, staring between her horse's ears.

"I will never displease you again," she said.

XXXVIII

LATE in the second winter following Alan's return, when Cecily had been married eighteen months, Charles Elderlin died, leaving everything that he possessed to his "beloved and devoted" daughter. He had been glad to die really. It was Peyton who brought him the news that he was in danger: he had had an attack of the grippe, and the treacherous disease, which he called "sporty," had taken an alarming turn. "Bad as that, is it?" he said, with an accent of grim humour, which taxed his strength. "Sounds rather anæmic to go out with the distemper; it's like dying of the pip; though this Russian microbe is a good 'scrapping' microbe — dead game." He had not intended a pun. He paused for a minute, exhausted. "Not much to live for since Cissie left.

"While there's a man and a woman, with hammer and sword
and pen,
He will work for the kids and the missus, forever and ever —
amen.

I never saw a man hurt himself working for anything else." He paused again for breath. Kipling's verses were among the few things that he had read in recent years; they were the only verses he had ever seen, he said, that were not written for kids and women, and that kids and

women could not understand. "Good old world, all the same," he added; "send for Cissie." It was true that he had had little to live for since Cecily left; in all the leisure hours of the day he had been possessed by a sense of waiting — of waiting for Cecily's step in the hall, for her presence in the room.

There had been a certain dignity in the strong, simple lines of Elderlin's life, the charm of which Cecily had not felt until she had lost him. Even then, she felt that it was beautiful for her mamma, and for herself, to have possessed a devotion like that, rather than that it had been beautiful in him to give it. She did not ask herself, as Nannie would have asked her, what she and her mamma had done to deserve devotion: it was natural and right that a man should be devoted to his wife and daughter; being a wife and daughter did not involve an obligation to any kind of activity; wifehood and daughterhood were states, not functions: one had done one's part when one had said "I will" at the altar, or been properly born; for the rest of one's life one was eternally and infinitely deserving. To be a husband or father of course was different. A man was obliged to make his women happy; that is what they became *his* for; and indeed what they existed for. It seemed to her scarcely a new proof of his devotion that he should have left her his whole estate. What had been his, naturally and rightly belonged to her; if he had exercised his legal power of partly disinheriting her, she would have felt robbed and outraged; she had never dreamed of the possibility of such a thing. What she was acutely,

analytically, conscious of, was that she had lost a support. She had lost some one to whom she could always have appealed in the certainty that he would back her up. She felt, for a time, even in her husband's house, very little and weak and alone, as she had sometimes felt of an evening, on a visit in a house in which she knew none of the people well. It was impossible that he could have enjoyed life much; he had not cared for interesting things; she perfectly understood from what had been said to her, with due reserves, by Peyton, that he had been well content to have done with it; but she herself was maimed and bereaved.

She had married Howard Lidcott within a year of his recovery; she had been continuously his coadjutor; she had brought him luck. He had been successful in the election in which he had told Urrey he meant to be a candidate, and he had been supported by the *Chronicle*. Alan had put a sudden stop to the hostilities of Isabel and Urrey; he proposed, he said in response to some ultimatum from Isabel, to be regarded as the first authority in respect to his own aims; if her aims were different from his, she would have to part company with him: Howard was at that moment the best man available; what he would be at a later moment, they could wait until that later moment to decide. After her father's death Cecily had passed two summers in Europe: her winters she had passed, of course, in Washington. She had been a little disillusioned in both places. The men and women in England and on the continent she had expected to differ from those that she had known much as their treas-

ures of painting and sculpture and architecture differed; famous men and women everywhere she had expected to differ from the men and women she had known in speech and bearing as widely as in fame. Without having examined the ground of her belief, she had taken it for granted that a notable personage was a personage who could not break an egg or damn the weather otherwise than in a notable manner. She had not expected them to dine on beef, or mutton, or fish, or fowl, or game; she had mentally endowed them with a meat and drink apart, as she had endowed them with an intellectual nectar and ambrosia; she had always understood that the heathen gods and goddesses were not of flesh and blood. She had seen a poet whose verses she loved come into the drawing-room tipsy after dinner; she had understood from books that that particular poet was likely to be tipsy after dinner, but it had not occurred to her that a man tipsy in books would be tipsy in the same fashion as friends of her papa, or that the tipsiness of a poet could differ so little from the tipsiness of an ordinary human being. It had not occurred to her that leaders in politics would ever talk with as little point and seemingly as little range of thought as the friends of her papa. She began to surmise that she had not read her books aright. She had found great consolation in the idea that a knowledge of literature—of the “best that has been said and thought in the world”—is a substitute for experience. The idea seemed to give a girl a chance. It had escaped her, she perceived, that the men who have said and thought the best things in the world have not only had before their

eyes and in their hearts the things and men they talked about, but also have presumed their readers to have before their eyes and in their hearts such things and men; so that a reader without experience is virtually a reader not in possession of the language.

She took her disillusionment in good part, when it came. She was sufficiently shrewd and collected when the facts were once before her. She did not think worse of the men and women in fairyland; she thought better of Elderlin and Howard. When she had conceived Howard's chiefs as a modern Bolingbroke and Harley, she was happy in Washington. She became, in effect, Howard's private secretary, with a sense of being called to high destinies. Howard's fellow-committeemen wondered at his turn for dissipation and at his power of work. He was always in evidence at dinners, receptions, and balls; his reports were always prompt, complete, neatly and even elegantly phrased; his speeches were written and carefully prepared. It was Cecily who did his reports and prepared his speeches. He sometimes submitted to her a rough draught; but she amplified, altered, cancelled it, till the final product was her own. When the final product did not meet his approval, she abounded in reasons, in authorities, in protests, in indignation, until he yielded. She knew his business better than he knew it himself; she knew what he had said, or rather what she had said, on a former occasion; she had in her head the outlines of a policy. She even coached him for his interviews; he was very much in love with her; she was very happy.

It was not until after his election for his second term that he discovered the inconvenience of a wife who has ideas and takes them seriously. As a good woman Cecily thought it a legislator's business to investigate abuses, which Howard called making "big trouble" for some one. He himself would not have been disposed to make big trouble for any one except an adversary. Cecily herself was not disposed to make big trouble for any one in private life; Howard told her she was lamentably lax, in social matters, in the administration of the police power placed in the hand of every nice woman; and rallied her on her inconsistency. She declined to pass on gossip even when it was piquant; she declined to "credit" scandal even when she thought it true; she called it slander. The position of a legislator was another matter. The integrity of a woman in society and the integrity of a man or of a corporation in business were things different in kind. In particular the integrity of the A. A. & B. and of every one connected with it was to be assailed on mere suspicion. The A. A. & B. had been subsidized long since, in effect a thousand years ago, by a grant of government lands; Cecily was morally certain, which means she possessed so little evidence that it was wicked to found a conclusion on it, that the surveys had favoured the company, that the surveys were "crooked." The A. A. & B. was under certain contracts with the government; Cecily was morally certain that the execution of the contracts on the part of the company had been crooked; she was morally certain that everything about the company was crooked; she called

it a matter of common knowledge. She was doubly sure of it because she knew that a dozen times the preliminaries of an investigation had been completed, and the investigation had been dropped, sometimes because of a press of business, sometimes because the majority of a committee were convinced that there was nothing to investigate. Cecily surmised shrewdly that "press of business" and "nothing to investigate" were phrases amounting to the same thing, and the intent of her surmise was not charitable. She did not intend that her investigation should be dropped. Howard thought the whole thing at first rather a bore, though he took the steps that she suggested. After a time he thought it rather good fun.

The immediate result of the first intimation that the public received of the possibility of an investigating committee was a sentence in a letter to Howard from his senior. "Some blackmailer is trying to hold up the A. A. & B.," James Lidcott wrote; "I wish you'd introduce a bill, or set on foot a movement for amending a provision in the Constitution, to increase the salaries of Congressmen. Whenever they are hard up they squeeze me."

This sentence produced a burst of hilarity in Howard. He showed it to Cecily. Neither he nor Cecily had known that the elder Lidcott was interested in the A. A. & B. Howard pronounced the situation "pretty smooth."

Close upon the letter followed a telegram, couched in terms of the vernacular. "You've put your foot in it up to your neck. Expect me Tuesday," the message read.

"You're a nice, dutiful little boy—I don't think," said Lidcott when he arrived. "This thing will cost money—but I've taken care of that. It's all the better that the affair started with you; it will cost less to stop it; and a hold-up now will prevent one later on. It was about time one was due; they come along at regular intervals like taxes. It makes a man think all the big corporations that can be squeezed are set down in a list and are touched up in their order. The amount of money I've poured into this 'burg' would sink a Spanish galleon."

"Charity begins at home," laughed Howard; "I find it unpatriarchal in you to make a settlement cost less because I am concerned in it."

"Charity begins at home, and business begins abroad; this matter is business."

"This matter is one of public spirit," said Howard; "ask Cecily; the investigation of the A. A. & B. is at the moment her fad. If you have to deal with her, you will find this particular settlement cost more than usual."

"It would cost you more than it would me, if the A. A. & B. were overhauled, and my connection with it dinned into every one's ears. You would never hear the end of it. The A. A. & B. does not court notoriety; the directors—dummies most of them—are of a retiring disposition; they feel that there is something ostentatious and exposed in a man's position in a witness chair, and that talking about themselves is in bad taste."

When Howard related this conversation to Cecily, and summarized the plan of action which Lidcott had proposed to him, he prepared himself for a bad quarter of

an hour. It did not belong to anything he knew of her to submit to be overruled; he expected a pitched battle. He had never risked a pitched battle with her; he had always abandoned his positions before a show of force; he had judged from the small fire of contempt and epigram which he had experienced, that a pitched battle would be unpleasant. He had always been a little afraid of Cecily; of the judgment she would pass on him, if she knew. The plain truth was that his fear of her was the basis of his love for her. She had never submitted, she had never given herself, she had always kept something back; or at least he had always kept something back; she had possessed the unending charm for him that he was never sure of her; he was of the men who weary when they are sure. There is a literary tradition that all men are like that, but the tradition is a libel.

She disappointed him. She did not engage in a pitched battle; she listened in silence, and glanced about her den. She had a little the passion of a collector and frankly a passion for making beautiful rooms. She had had the luck to get together a number of pieces in sculptured and gilded wood, in inlaid brass and tortoise shell, in which the great cabinet-makers of France in their great period had recorded their fancy and skill; and she had made her den, with a care, pressed almost to the point of foppery, for historical detail, a fit place for their reception.

She herself, in her close-fitting, "tailor-made" cloth gown, was a passably ridiculous anachronism in the midst of that scrupulous reversion to the time of Louis

XIV; but she had become an imposing figure as a matron, and the work that lay recorded before her in a litter of papers on her desk was of a quality to check ridicule.

"Well?" she said, when he had finished his narrative.

He thought the pitched battle was coming, and began the attack, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"The *pater* is right; I have put my foot into it up to my neck; his idea of how to extricate my foot, and the rest of me, up to my neck, I submit to your superior wisdom. For myself, nothing better at the moment has occurred to me."

"My superior wisdom is wholly at one with yours and his," she said; "I see no other way at all of extricating you without some risk of scandal."

"Of course you are disappointed; so am I," he said; "we made a colossal blunder — through no fault we could have foreseen. So much the worse; there are others; blunders have been made before."

She in her turn shrugged her shoulders.

"We have made more blunders than one — through no fault that could have been foreseen," she said.

And there, for the time being, the matter was dropped.

They were going out to dinner that evening, and as she joined him in the vestibule she handed him an envelope.

"There is an index of the papers in my desk," she said, "and where to find them."

He stared at her.

"Is this a joke?" he asked. "I've never known you to be given to practical jokes, though I'm prepared for anything in you that is charming."

She shrugged her shoulders again, and he handed her into the carriage.

"I haven't sense of humour enough to joke," she said, as they rolled away side by side. "You have your own ideas, I have mine; they do not seem to be the same. I have the honour to present my resignation."

Howard laughed.

"You and your ideas! — and your resignation! I have the happiness not to find it possible to accept it."

"You will do me the favour, please, of achieving the impossible."

XXXIX

THE next morning Howard found his mail untouched. Cecily, whose habits were early, usually opened it before he came down, and for the most part answered it. Howard did not like to dictate letters, or to prepare papers, and indeed he had not arranged the business of his day so as to leave him time. He went in search of Cecily. She was sitting before the fire, her hands crossed on a book in her lap. The customary litter on her table and desk had given place to a scrupulous order.

Normally Howard was not given to speculative analysis or to unpleasant emotions. "To do a thing well," he had once said to Cecily, "a man must concentrate himself; one must choose; for my part I choose to be happy; it is a career like another, to which one must give one's self with a certain exclusiveness." Under pressure of circumstances, however, he was capable of reflection and of pain. In the minute during which he stood in the open doorway without rousing Cecily, he perceived that there are but two sorts of the true marriage, the effortless harmony and oneness of two wills, that every lover, man or woman, demands: that in which one dedicates himself to the other simply, makes himself a servant in the other's hands without will or purpose of his own, gives all, and asks nothing, and is radiantly

content with whatever, much or little, is given in return; and that in which two people, born by miracle of one mind and one will, by miracle have found each other. He had never supposed himself born of one mind and one will with Cecily. He had begun by playing at dedication; he had begun by a very real dedication, with a time limit. He had not taken pains to define the matter to himself, but instinctively his expectation had been that in the end he should dominate her, that the natural reward of his servitude would be mastery, that she would ultimately, willingly, dedicate herself to him because he had dedicated himself to her. It came to him in a flash as he stood there, that she would never do anything of the kind. He had long had his idea of what a passionate gentleness and kindness, a passionate championship, in Cecily would be; it would be just the most precious thing in the world. He hated her suddenly as he saw it beyond his grasp. He hated her mute obstinacy, he hated the judgment she passed on him; he hated her having ideas and not having knowledge enough behind them to know when concessions must be made, he hated her demanding things of him he could not do. He had nothing to console him but a contemptuous satisfaction, that if he could not possess her, no one else should.

"The top o' the morning to you, Mistress Semiramis; and a penny for your thoughts; I want them at an unconscionable bargain," he said, advancing.

"I'm not sure it is polite to name a penny as an unconscionable price for my thoughts," she replied, "though no doubt it is."

"It was not the penny that was unconscionable, but the thoughts," he said.

"You shall have them for nothing."

He was not right in fancying that the judgment she had passed upon him was harsh. She took his habitual levity for an incurable boyishness; the things which he attempted to do that she thought wrong, she regarded as sheer blunders, and she understood his yielding to her protests as a deference to her wisdom, not to herself. It was natural and perhaps inevitable that a man should never become quite mature, that he should always remain light-hearted; his world was free from obstacles, he had little to make him heavy-hearted. She had never thought her papa quite mature. But a boy whom James Lidcott could take out of her hands at any moment and use to defeat her, a boy who could at the first glance see no dishonour in the plan James Lidcott had proposed, she found it too humiliating to attempt to work with. Elderlin had held and expressed much the same opinion of James Lidcott as Cecil Windet held; and Cecily thought him utterly unprincipled and utterly vulgar.

"I was thinking that I could write as good a book as this" — she held up the "Lilies of Pershore." "I dare say that is sheer conceit; but I ought to know much more of what I should write about than Rhoda Hansley; though every one says that Gilbert Rennison helped her with the 'Lilies.' At all events, since I am no longer Prime Minister, I must find a new occupation."

"You speak as if you had got the sack!"

"It comes to the same thing; I could not command a majority."

"A grateful country will reinstate you, at the general election."

"A grateful country will find it difficult to play fast and loose with me. I wish, by the way," she added, with a touch of weariness, "when you have found a place for them, you would have the papers taken out of my desk. I understand that people who scribble tales must take notes and lay up 'human documents'; I propose to lay up whole drawers full; I propose to be very thorough. I can at least be respectable if I am thorough."

It was true, Howard reflected angrily; she had used him so long as he was subservient; she had used him so long as by any means whatever she could keep him subservient; the instant he took a line of his own, under whatever pressure, she washed her hands of him. If she had tried a pitched battle with him, he would have had some hopes of making her at least listen to reason; but he could not be eloquent in a refrigerator. The appropriateness of a pitched battle as an occasion for making any one listen to reason, and the contrast between a pitched battle and a refrigerator, occurred to him as the images passed through his mind. His mental reflection was, "Damn the expense, when it comes to metaphor." Cecily was right; his levity was incurable.

"My compliments to you on your versatility," he said. "Now we shall hear of nothing but problem-plots, symbolism, realism, romanticism, and psychology. We used

to lunch in an inspiration of party management and go out to dinner in a debate in the House; we shall now lunch in a declaration of the tender passion and go out to dinner in the miseries of the slums or in an ecstasy of narrative transition. I hope you will give your heroines pretty names — Clarissa, and Claire, and Valentine, and Seraphina, and Angelina; it is the least that you can do for them."

"My versatility is in need of compliments. It seemed to me when I picked up this book to see how it was made, that I had never read a novel before."

"I don't know what I *shall* do about my letters," he said, with an effect of rueful comedy.

"After all, I am not a private secretary," said Cecily; "you will have to get one."

"Capital idea," said Howard, and left the room singing: —

"J'suis un garçon pas tyrannique,
Simple et modeste dans mes goûts,
Je n'me mêl' jamais d'politique,
Qu'on fass'ce qu'on voudra. . . . j'm'en fous!"

An hour later, his dictation finished, he came back to her to bid her good-by for the day.

"Je n'm'occup' de rien — je laiss' faire;
Qu'les aut's soient sag's ou qu'ils soient fous,
Bons ou méchants — c'est leur affaire;
Pourvu que j'sois heureux . . . j'm'en fous!"

he sang. "Adieu, Cissie; I leave you at the call of duty; I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not

duty more; councillors of state await me; I shall be back at six; we dine out to-night; wear your pearl gown with scarlatina furbelows, and let the 'yoke of the ruffle hang round the frill,' and you may polish a period *en route*. Adieu, Cissie."

"Good-by," she said, and meditated putting him in a book.

Neither Howard nor James Lidcott was able in the end to put a stop to the investigation. It had been Cecily's aim, from the first, to associate Howard with men who could neither be checked nor controlled. The directors of the A. A. & B. were summoned from their retirement and besought to lay all modesty aside. Even James Lidcott was pressed to tell what he knew, and he told it with a cynical bluntness and self-justification. There was not a business of any magnitude conducted under the Federal law, he said, that could be managed safely or profitably without maintaining agents at the capital to defend it. His own agents sometimes demanded considerable remittances from him, which he made. He had been advised by counsel not to demand an accounting of the moneys thus advanced, and he had taken his counsel's advice. Cecily had the consolation of people who do not feel themselves unclean or stained for having pilfered a letter or peeped through a keyhole if they discover in the letter, or beyond the keyhole, what they expected. She held herself innocent of having defamed the A. A. & B. on insufficient evidence, the instant that sufficient evidence was found. Her disappointment was that she had injured every one concerned except those

who were mainly responsible. James Lidcott and the directors of the A. A. & B. had been able, through early intelligence, supplied them, Cecily fancied, by Howard, to make a good thing on the stock exchange out of the mischance of the A. A. & B. Cecily still thought Howard a boy, but her cheeks burned with shame that she was married to him.

Howard had passed a bad quarter of an hour—or rather a bad quarter of a year—until the worst came to the worst, when he reassumed his accustomed cheerfulness: indeed, for him personally the affair had taken a wholly profitable turn. There had been the usual display of eloquence, verbatim reports, diversity of comment, editorials and enterprise, on the part of the daily press; the *Chronicle* in particular, under Isabel's express command, had surpassed itself; all of which affected public opinion less than a dispassionate reader would suppose, because the big masses read with disgust and incredulity what they did not like, and read with satisfaction what confirmed them in their previous notions. The directors it affected not at all. They told their wives and daughters that the whole thing was a libel, and their wives and daughters found it more comfortable to believe them than to doubt them. Their sons they expected to be loyal to them, on principle, and were not disappointed. Besides, they knew that with an infinitesimal part of their winnings their children could purchase, by public endowments, a degree of public reverence and esteem which they themselves could not achieve at all. Certain men actually in politics were embarrassed; though Howard was made an

exception. His connection, in the first instance, with the affair was regarded as wholly honourable to him, and was taken as proof that he had no part in the transcendental sagacities in the manipulation of stocks which had brought a stain on his name. Both these points were raised in his favour, at Alan's request, in the *Chronicle*. When James Lidcott was brought prominently forward in the scandal, Howard asked his colleagues, on obvious grounds of etiquette and impartiality, to excuse him from any active part in the investigation. During the time when James Lidcott was on the witness-stand, he absented himself from Washington; he took a week's holiday in New York.

The third evening of his visit he went with a party of men to the Gaiety, to see Minnie Fearing, who a few weeks before had been a nobody in dramatic circles, and who had just made a prodigious hit, a success of scandal, in "Mrs. Warren's Profession." The manager of the Gaiety, it was reported, had lost his head about her, or she would never have got her chance, and he would never have ventured to outrage the public by producing the play. It may be supposed, however, that he knew his business; the public delights in being outraged; and Minnie Fearing, for whom the play had been rearranged so as to make Mrs. Warren the heroine, rendered the part with a brutal fidelity and passion, an intelligence and vigour, that placed her among actresses of the first rank. In the middle of the second act she recognized Howard, and at the first opportunity sent him a summons to come and speak with her. He found her in her

dressing-room, with its appointments of mirrors, rouge-pots and pomatums, wigs, robes, swords, the machinery of stage personality.

She looked up at him with a broad good humour which reminded him of the first time he had seen her, adrift on the Ohio.

"Don't be shy, Howard: I have long since forgiven you that bit of a scar that you carry about as a keepsake of me. You were so long in coming, I thought you were not coming at all."

"Our last interview was so vivacious it would excuse some hesitation on my part in coming. Though I did not hesitate; I lost my way in a practicable landscape in the wings. I've always wondered how much you meant when you struck me. Now that you have forgiven yourself, you may tell me. But first my congratulations on your luck."

"I meant to put your light out, for fair," she said, with a reminiscence of anger; "but now I mean to invite you to supper. As for my luck, I haven't had any; what I've got I've worked for, starved for, fought for." She said it with an energy that was almost a menace. "But I can't talk to you here; there isn't time. Sit still after the last act, and I will come for you."

Howard was surprised and delighted at the degree to which her success had embellished her.

"The things you take for granted!" he said. "I'm with a party; come take supper with us."

"Bring them with you," she replied; "I'm with a party too; I wasn't inviting you to a tête-à-tête. There

will be a lot of us. It is you who take things for granted. There, that's my summons; I must go."

Howard and his party saw the audience and the orchestra depart, and the attendants cover the plush seats in the darkened parterre with their linen night-gowns. The stage still remained lighted. A débutante, who was eating Wiener Wurst and drinking Bass's ale before the foot-lights, was to undergo her final rehearsal. Her friends and counsellors, in the interval, came in by twos and threes, and found themselves places in the vacant boxes and parterre. The débutante had laid aside her sausages and ale and was posing for representatives of the illustrated press, who wished to photograph her in costume and attitudes, when Minnie Fearing, sometime Dora Crispin, opened the door of Howard's box.

"Mrs. Warren salutes you," she said, with a curtsy of the time of Louis XIV, of which Mrs. Warren would have been incapable. "I'm as hungry as Little Red Riding-Hood's grandmamma, and as the wolf who ate her, and had appetite for more!"

Dora had taken a minor part in an operetta founded on the tale of Little Red Riding-Hood; and her remark about hunger was a plagiarism. The pathetic tenor, Red Riding-Hood's official lover in the piece, had announced his hunger in those precise words at a little fête, at which the whole company was present, in celebration of the success of the first night.

XL

WHEN Howard found that he had gained rather than lost by the investigation into the A. A. & B., he thought the situation comic; but inevitably his luck gave him a better opinion of himself. He might be as cynical as he chose about the new estimation in which his colleagues and the public held him; he accepted their estimate; he became one of his own public. And when he found himself obliged to conduct his own affairs, he became interested in them, even in his correspondence. He enjoyed his freedom; he discovered that he had ideas of his own. Of what use having ideas of his own before, when they were certain to be set aside for ideas of Cecily's? No subordinate takes the trouble to cherish ideas of his own, unless he is a subordinate in rebellion. He found to his immense surprise that he could play the game; he had half supposed he could not; the compliments which he had paid Cecily unstintingly had been sincere. At present he paid himself the compliments; he had formed the habit of attaching praise to the despatch of his business; and he found the praise altogether as comfortable as Cecily had found it. This was severely rational. But while he praised himself, he ceased retrospectively to praise Cecily. She was not so wonderful as he had thought her. He saw her for the first time with the eyes of a stranger, with the eyes of a

man not in love with her, with the eyes of a woman. She was a mountebank whose trick he had discovered. She was still a gifted woman, but nothing supernatural. She was still good to look at, but not so good as he had thought. He wondered whether he had not married her in her last bloom and whether she had not aged with strange quickness since. No result was more likely from the work she had done. And, the instant she lost him as an instrument to work with, it disconcerted him to find her so helpless. She was diminished, she was a colonel without a regiment. He was both colonel and regiment. The one thing needed to heighten his importance in the eyes of his world, and therefore in his own, was that James Lidcott should die and leave him unconditionally master of his fortune; and this James Lidcott opportunely did. Howard was colonel of a bigger regiment than Cecily had ever commanded.

Cecily, too, found herself diminished. She had been surprised in the first days to find herself not indispensable; she had, to her own amazement, been a little piqued, a little chagrined. She had made no plans to be recalled on James Lidcott's departure, but she had expected to be; and she had not expected to find that her not being recalled would make a difference in her importance. Mrs. Payne-Outram and Mrs. Archdale were staying with her at the time; Mrs. Outram to obtain a change in the tariff "for revenue only" on the importation of works of art, Mrs. Archdale to obtain subscriptions for the hospital-ship *Maine*. Cecily had always felt an unmeasured contempt for Mrs. Outram as a busybody, a parasite

upon other people's interests because she had none of her own, a congenital charlatan, who pretended probably even to herself that she cared for the things about which she agitated herself and her acquaintance, and whose pretensions were equally transparent to both. Cecily had felt a certain contempt for Mrs. Archdale; Mrs. Archdale took her feminine world and its futilities seriously. Cecily shrugged her shoulders at the feminine world and its futilities. Properly speaking, there was but one world, and the application of distinctions of sex to it was ridiculous. One could either do something worth doing or one could not, and that was an end of it. She was sick of women's rights, and women's clubs, and women in art, and women's duties, and women's "sphere." She was not a woman twenty-four hours in the day. She was not a woman from nine to four, in "business hours," in the hours that count; she was a woman, at the utmost, only after dinner, when she did not care to drink or smoke, and at the opera, where she liked the best place. To be sure, it occurred to her that a forger or a highwayman is not a forger or a highwayman twenty-four hours in the day, but she dismissed the simile as far-fetched; a woman was not a criminal, at least not necessarily. She was a human being like another, with an aptitude, in her leisure hours, for being a woman if she chose. An aptitude for being a woman was like an aptitude for playing polo or golf, or for small talk or private theatricals. Mrs. Archdale made a fad of her aptitude. Mrs. Outram made her aptitude the business of life, having that one aptitude and no other. And yet

Mrs. Archdale and Mrs. Outram, at the actual moment, were persons of more importance than herself; she confessed it with a sense of wonder and self-distrust. They had engagements, points of contact, "relations," which at the moment she had not. She finished by defining a person of importance as a person with engagements—fifty a day.

She would have been happier if the bit of fiction which she had purposed writing had shown any signs of getting itself accomplished. When she had assured herself that she could put out a more effective book than Rhoda Hansley's "*Lilies of Pershore*," she had thought that one writes a novel as one writes a letter: one has something to say; one says it. She had written hundreds of letters. She would not have attempted to compose a scientific treatise or an essay without a diffident preparation, but any one could conceive a tale, and any one who could spell and make paragraphs could record a tale with orderly effectiveness. At the end of three months she became convinced that making tales is as much a profession apart as painting a portrait or pleading a case at law. Any one could blunder at a portrait, and but for legal restrictions any one could blunder at pleading a case at law. To be sure, there were no legal restrictions to hinder one from making as wretched a novel as one chose, but in the last resort Cecily was both proud and shy. If she could not turn out something good, she would turn out nothing. She had read little enough of modern fiction, or of fiction of any kind, poetry apart, at the time when she determined on her

attempt. She had read "Humphrey Clinker," "Clarissa," and "Tom Jones," because she found them in the library at Soames. She had read "The Heavenly Twins," "The Manxman," and "Sentimental Tommy," because the women she met talked of them till it made her ill not to be able to contradict them with point and pertinence. When she had qualified herself for this social courtesy, she made an exception of "Sentimental Tommy." She had not imagined that she could produce a second "Humphrey Clinker" or "Tom Jones"; she did not know enough; but she could not do worse than produce a second "Heavenly Twins" or "Manxman." She no longer thought lightly of the "Lilies of Pershore." She no longer doubted that Gilbert Rennison had helped Rhoda to write it. There were a thousand things in the book—Cecily had set a pencil mark opposite each of them—that a girl could not have known, or dared to guess. She herself became acutely conscious that she had never known a man, not even one—had never seen a man; she had seen only men masked in public, men masked when women whom they respected were present. What was a man like when women were not present?—What was a man like, *inside*, when no one was present?—What was a great town like in the streets which ladies did not visit, or in the streets which they did visit during hours in which their visitation was not expected and prepared for? She did not know. She had strayed far enough amongst the poor at Soames to guess, but she could not make a book of guesses. Incidentally, it occurred to her that she had never known but one

woman really, — herself. Obviously other women were not like herself. She was in despair. The one thing that consoled her was that making a book, a book that counts, is a man's work. She had been afraid it was not.

While Mrs. Payne-Outram was in Washington she set afoot a subscription for an afternoon performance of "Mrs. Warren's Profession," the company to return by a special train to New York in time for its evening engagement. Mrs. Outram said that, in spite of its success of scandal, the play was to be considered as the author intended it should be, as a document in regard to the position of a clear majority of women in the modern world. "The development of machinery has deprived women of the opportunity of producing or helping to produce anything of value, while they remain at home," she said at a fashionable pink tea, at which her address was the main attraction. "The advent of the great retail store has deprived her of her opportunity at once to remain at home and to attend the 'shop.' The time was when every additional woman in the house was an additional help. At the present moment every additional woman in the house is an additional burden. The time was when a woman might stay at home and be self-respecting; apart even from the drudgery of housework, she could earn her salt. At the present moment, if she does not leave her home she is in a position of utter and humiliating dependence. If she has not a fortune of her own, which some one else has made for her, she is an object of charity. And if, when she does leave her

home, she is not trained as a man would be trained and paid as a man would be paid, she has no chance to obtain the money which she needs to be 'self-respecting,' except that which Mrs. Warren mentions: she must 'attract some man who can afford to be good to her.' With the understanding that the play was a document, society went to see it. Society will go to see anything that is of good report, and good report is purely an affair of the right words. Cecily recognized Minnie Fearing instantly. She recognized also that Minnie Fearing was presenting her part solely for some one in the Lidcotts' box, presumably for Howard. In the dinner-scene she wore a necklace which Cecily identified as one that Howard had described and offered her shortly before his visit to New York. There was a moment in which her impulse was to excuse herself and to go home. A moment afterward she drew her chair nearer the stage and sat in full view of the audience.

It had never occurred to her that she could be jealous, least of all of Dora Crispin. She had thought of Dora Crispin and of her kind as belonging to the "lower animals." One's business was, within reason, to be kind to them, when they repented; it would be ridiculous, in their success, to take them seriously. When Howard had told her in the beginning — a thousand years ago — about Dora, she had not been indignant or outraged; she had piqued herself on having learned too much from books to be indignant or outraged; she had thought him a child, a hobbledehoy, in need of common sense and a guardian. Even at the moment she

could not assure herself that the pang she felt was jealousy. She did not hate Mrs. Warren. On the contrary, she found her an admirable actress. She found her, as she had found her at Soames, a woman naturally dominant, and beautiful with the rank, aggressive, uncultured beauty of a tropical flower. She did not for a moment accept Mrs. Warren as a possible rival. What passed through her mind was mainly that, but for the attempt on Howard's life, she might never have consented to marry him. She had never loved him; when all was said, she had never respected him; she had pitied him; it had seemed to her that he had had his bitter lesson, and needed help. She had thought it in her power to give the help he needed, and in giving it to make her own life less insignificant. The sight of the necklace gave her a measure of the mistake that she had made, and gave her, too, a certain cold contempt for Howard.

On the other hand she was at all times keen enough in a concern for her own dignity. She was not indifferent at the moment to a notion of reconquering her freedom. She had married Howard in the expectation that he should be subject to her. She had not the slightest intention of consenting in such circumstances to become subject to him.

"Wait an instant; come in here; I have something to say," she dropped when they were once within the house, leading the way to her work-room. "I had not intended to speak of it until to-morrow, but the thing is a bore, and we had better both be rid of it at once. You saw Dora Crispin in New York? You need not hesitate,"

she added; "I have not the least intention of making a scene, either now or afterwards."

Howard had hated Mrs. Warren for wearing the jewels he had given her. He had hated her for playing obviously for him. At the same time he had delighted in her effrontery. He had expressed his mixed emotions by pronouncing her, mentally, a little devil. He hated Cecily for taking the tone of a superior with him and putting him in a corner. He had no notion of resigning in Cecily's behalf any advantage that he possessed. At the same time, if he did not delight in her power to take the tone of a superior with him, he gave her full credit for it. She was the woman in all the world who could most deeply touch his pride.

"Yes, I saw her; I took supper with her; I saw her a number of times."

"Thanks; it is a comfort that you are not a coward; I never supposed you were," said Cecily. "I make no objection to your taking as many suppers with Dora Crispin as you find an appetite for; I daresay she is amusing. You will not have the least objection to my turning the key in my door. You have wanted your liberty, and have taken it, without consulting me. I shall consider myself released, without consulting you; though not, as you see, without forewarning you."

She paused a moment to give him a chance to take this in.

"Of course, if you remonstrate," she added, "I am prepared for a full explanation."

"I do not remonstrate," he said.

XLI

ONE afternoon in the late spring, when the makers of opinion had begun to formulate their judgment upon Howard's conduct during his second term, Urrey spread his hulk on a divan and surrendered himself to a sense of the unsatisfactoriness of things. He had done his work; he had the blues. He was not sorry to have the blues when he had done his work; he regarded the blues as a resource. He thought of going to a theatre, but there was no theatre to which he wanted to go. He thought of hunting up a companion, but there was no one he wanted to see, and nothing he wanted to say. He thought that the men in the States are destined to succeed because when all is said they are not happy. They are incapable of amusing themselves; they do not know how; therefore they work. In Germany he had thought the national taste for beer and music a national curse; it made people happy for long hours together at small expense. In France and Italy he had found the national misfortune still greater; the people were interested in each other and in themselves; they could spend long hours contentedly with almost no expense at all. The ideal for an ambitious people was cheap necessities, brief and ruinously expensive pleasures, and pervading discontent; and this ideal he found

realized in himself and his countrymen. They had never forgotten, he and they, that they were colonists and exiles. They loved the big inclement land in which they were born; they were at home in it as they found it impossible to be at home elsewhere; but they were not comfortable as Englishmen, Germans, Frenchmen, are comfortable when they are at home. They were the richest and most instructed of barbarians, proud of their barbaric virtues; distrustful and scornful of people who were timid or impatient in the presence of risk or hardship; conscious of their strength, and that the world is going their way; conscious that they have been pioneers, and have won what they possess from savages who neither gave nor asked quarter, and who taught them fatalism while the English gave them humour; and yet vaguely restless and wistful for they knew not what, welcoming any adventure, or even work, as a diversion. Also he thought of Isabel. He did not find her either good or bad; he found her strong and beautiful. She would be good or bad according to circumstances; and circumstances meant a man. He liked her. If she had not been so rich, he would have asked her to be his wife; not because he imagined her to be the only woman to speak of in the world, but because she was the only one he had happened to meet. He was not deterred by her riches for fear she should suppose him mercenary. He conceived the States as a plutocracy, and was sensitive to differences of caste; and yet the only thing for a man in the States to work for was some woman; and if she was above him in birth and fortune, so much the better; she

was the more worth working for. No man with a sense of humour could conceive a grand passion for making his personal fortune, or for building model tenements, or for raising or lowering the tariff on importations from foreign countries, or for maintaining gold as the standard of money. This was perhaps a pity, Urrey reflected, but man is a dramatic animal and reserves his big emotions for big stage effects. When the nation came, as, please God, it was rapidly coming, to a sense that steam and electricity had brought the States nearer to China and to England than Paris was to Berlin a hundred years ago, and purely continental politics had ceased to exist, then an interest in one's business and in one's home would take the minor place in a man's life which belongs to them, and which they took during the war between the North and the South.

Urrey was a conservative. He felt no allegiance to a millennium of rocking-chairs and full pantries for the poor, and of automobiles and champagne for the well-to-do. He felt an allegiance to certain virtues which one cannot practise without privation. When a man had before him an object for which it was worth while to fight, he was careless of rocking-chairs and automobiles; he felt the pinch in his belly only when his soul was starved; and relief for the slums and the palliation of "agricultural distress" lay in making the national life worth a man's while. The nation, even in its slums, was hungry, not for meat, but for an idea. A public policy might make either heroes or sensualists; it could not do both. Personally, Urrey was not greatly concerned; un-

der no régime would he have been a crusader; his business was with his pen. He did not want to be a hero himself; he was only sorry for his contemporaries. He felt a keen sympathy for the man who possessed money enough and found himself obliged to make more, on penalty of becoming an amateur of bibelots, a "sport," or a drawing-room "tame cat." He felt a keen sympathy for the man who might have led a regiment or helped to govern an empire, and who found himself obliged, on penalty of ennui, to cheat his neighbour on the stock-market, or, if to cheat is a harsh word, to outwit him. The race had too much sense of humour to produce its big devotions for small objects; but a life without big devotions was a mean little life.

While Urrey pursued these reflections he fondled the ears of a great cat, whose disposition to walk into danger and to behave himself gallantly when he was in a tight place, had earned him the name of Tommy Atkins.

"Tommy, you are a bloated little egoist and sensualist," said Urrey; "neither you nor any of your tribe have ever conceived a notion of the brotherhood of pussies; you are all of you incapable of organizing a society for the prevention of cruelty to man; and your morals is unspeakable. Therefore we monkeys, who, with all of our grimaces, worship the idea, 'do' you pussy, because it would seem as if God cares for the idea; at least the idea prevails. But I like you, Tommy, you heathen, because your manners are almost perfect; in particular considering how little you care for me.

You are an individualist, pussy, with a big *I*, and the most unobtrusive companion in the world."

Tommy showed his appreciation of these remarks and showed his manners by rolling over on his back and playing at catch-catch with Urrey's hand.

Alan had entered while Urrey was speaking, with a countenance which Urrey mentally pronounced as cheerful as a bob-tailed flush.

"Me and Atkins are having a monologue," said Urrey; "Atkins is doing the heavy looking on."

"Don't let me interrupt you," said Alan, handing Urrey an official envelope.

"Business before pleasure," said Urrey, sitting up, — a movement which Tommy resented. "Quite right, Tommy; it is *lèse-majesté* to disturb you; but keep your shirt on, and don't get hot under the collar. It is the glad tidings of the western continent and the first article of its religion that excitement does not pay. You don't seem to be particularly set up," he added, when he had mastered the contents of the envelope; "you would have been as warm as all hell with the blower on if this had come five years ago."

"Five years is a geologic period," said Alan; "I've seen this thing coming since the old red sandstone epoch. A man can almost always get anything when he don't want it. All things come to him who waits until he does not want them. We get at twenty the things we wanted at fifteen, and at thirty the things we wanted at twenty. Life's a fake: behold the formula." Alan was laughing.

"You take a pill, you are bilio-sentimental like Byron; I was bilio-sentimental, too, an hour ago; to-morrow I shall think myself the greatest thing that ever happened. This thing's a regular cinch — c-i-n-c-h," spelled Urrey; "you can name your man."

"Do you know any man you would find it exhilarating to name?"

"No, I don't."

"Then perhaps you had better recommend the universe to take a pill."

Alan still held to the practical philosophy of his early twenties, but with a difference. He still held that agreeable and disagreeable were just distinctions invented by men with a passion for classification; but he had come to perceive that all things do not fall in those two classes, or rather that there is a certain condition of insensibility in which nothing whatever falls in either class. He had never imagined the existence of insensibility; when he had seen it in Francis Brigantine he had regarded it as a pose. When he found it in himself he was completely taken by surprise. He had made up his account with things on the hypothesis that they possessed definite salient qualities; that they inevitably made one tingle with pleasure or pain in the presence of them; that come what might, it would find one intensely alive. He could still acknowledge that the definite and salient qualities were there, but he did not find himself tingling. He had taken it for granted that he should always wake in the morning in a flush of eagerness for something in the coming day, eagerness for contest, eagerness for pleasure,

eagerness for at least something; he awoke instead in a dull feeling of depression that made him wish he had not waked at all. He was not intensely alive; properly speaking, he was not alive at all; he was at a loss to account for it.

Certainly it did not occur to him to look to his marriage for an explanation. Before Isabel had contrived her opportunity to enlighten Nannie, his own account of his marriage, if he had given one, would have been nearer Isabel's than Nannie's; but he had not felt his marriage a heavy burden. After Nannie's offer to leave him, and the rearrangement which the details of his ridiculous courtship took in his eyes, when he looked back on them with his better knowledge of Nannie, he felt it still less a burden. She was a good little woman, as much a dupe of circumstance as he himself; and in a sense he had injured her to keep his peace with Cecil, and to satisfy a scruple of his own. His manner of devotion to her had been from the first a grimace; he was glad to drop it; he replaced it by a manner of gentle respect and friendship and intimacy which was sincere. Or rather, he still said the same things to her; he had always been honest in what he said; he still presented the same manner to her; his manner had always been honest; but she had misinterpreted the things he said and the manner he presented, and he found it a comfort to know that she no longer misinterpreted them. He had found a certain fresh delight in meeting her on the new understanding; he had passed hours with her which he had found more charming than any hour he had ever passed before. He had been true to his own sense of fact

when he reminded her of the rarity of the great loves. Would he have loved and been beloved with a great love if he had married Cecily Elderlin? He did not know; at least he disbelieved in the sanity of the great loves: he knew that he himself had been insane. Marriage, when all was said, was an affair of the race, in which the individual played the part of conscious public servant or of dupe. No man in his senses would think of binding himself in marriage to a woman except for the sake of rearing children; he could obtain all else a woman has to give at a better bargain, and be the happier for his liberty; he could be happier still, and with a better conscience, if he found all that a woman has to give not worth while, and if he could do his duty by the race in some other way than rearing children. If he lost his senses, he might no doubt think some woman what no woman is, except in story-books, in which the inspired *littérateur* seeks for the word that thrills, and sets down what he knows not to be true, because the great public, and himself amongst them, wishes to be helped to be good by the contemplation of perfections and impeccabilities. The great public aims to be good: it cannot hit the mark, but it can miss it less widely if the mark be shown it from time to time: and it looks to the literature it loves, to show it the mark. Alan had no objection to offer; he was one of the great public; he wished to be good himself. But he had no wish to be a dupe; and the great public is not duped.

No, it did not matter greatly whom a man married, if he was fated to marry at all. The literary tradition that

personal relations are the big things in life was sheer fiction. The big things were the things worth a grave man's ambition. If he did not find ecstasies in his home, so much the better for him and for every one else; he would find the less distraction from his work out of doors where he belonged. A man whose work did not lie out of doors was as ridiculous as a man in an apron.

XLII

SHORTLY after his conversation with Urrey, Alan found himself in a position which gave him a momentary zest. Howard had ascertained his reflection to be so gravely menaced that he had come on from Washington to give the matter his personal attention, and had found himself and his managers blocked at every turn. Alan could count the days to the time when Howard would find it politic to make an unconditional submission. On his return to the States after his marriage he had taken neither Isabel's nor Urrey's attitude in regard to Howard. Isabel's was one of mere passionate personal hostility; Urrey's was academic. *Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus*—false in friendship, false in everything—was Urrey's principle. Alan found it ridiculous to judge anything so many-sided as a human being by a principle so simple as that. He had overruled both Isabel and Urrey, and given Howard his support; in part perhaps out of chivalry toward Cecily, who had chosen Howard; in part for the reason he alleged, that there was no one in the field whom he preferred. "Isabel would not judge a three-year-old after that fashion, and you would not judge a book," he had said. "The question is not whether Howard is a bad friend, but whether he is a bad representative. Besides, he is not a bad friend unless you choose to think him so. He has quite as

much right to be a great man as I have. Also he seems to have the power — which I at the moment have not.” What he did not say was that a secret bitterness possessed him, in the presence of which any disappointment Howard might cause him was scarcely distinguishable. What he did not say was that an offence against a person like himself was purely formal; to take it seriously would be ridiculous; he could not say honestly that he cared whether Howard had taken advantage of his absence or not; he could not say honestly that he cared for anything; he kept silence only because it is decent for a man to hide his wound. In course of time he came to feel that Urrey’s judgment had been better than his own. “Jimmy,” he said, in acknowledgment of his error, “you were inspired; but your reasons were horrid. I recognize in you a great dumb soul, Urrey, otherwise tongue-tied. We will dish Howard; all things come to him who waits and labours; in particular if he labours first, and last, and all the time. Behold the great American doxology.” Howard was shifty — “slippery”; there was need that some one should gain a firm hold on him. Alan had found it so difficult to obtain a firm hold, that his obstinacy had been aroused. The hold once obtained, he had discovered a certain brutal pleasure in tightening his grip.

He received one morning a note from Howard, asking for an appointment at Estcourt. Howard’s wish that their meeting should escape the notice of the newspapers was plain. There was still fight in him.

He came in, fresh and untroubled, with an air of eternal youth about him, which seemed as inalienably

a quality of his body as the set of his shoulders and the carriage of his head. Since the elder Lidcott's death, the house in which he and Alan had played together as boys had become his official residence when he took a flying trip to his district to cast his vote, and he had walked across the fields and through the strip of woods that lay between Lidcott and Estcourt, and had stopped in sheer coquetry to pluck a *boutonnière* of wild violets. His eyes were as vividly bright, his hair as vividly crisp and black, as when he was Alan's hero, and beneath his light tweeds the play of his muscles was that of the light, alert body of a lad of eighteen. A look of bitter fun came into Alan's face as he greeted him; he felt old; he felt ridiculous; he was gray-headed; not very, but enough to feel the difference. He had missed his life, and Howard had, in some way not at all plain, possessed himself of it; and he was in a position to deprive Howard of the possession, but not in the least in a position to make use of it himself. Howard's office seemed, in Howard's presence, a mere feather in the cap of youth, one of the natural insignia of high spirits and jauntiness; there was something churlish, there was a suggestion of envy, in plucking it away.

A look of fun came into Howard's face also, as he stepped forward to take Alan's hand; but the fun was not bitter; it was the gayest, most thoughtless fun in the world. Alan was reminded for the moment of young girls he had seen, who had been sheltered from all suspicion that such things as weariness, or pain not pain of indigestion or toothache — that grief and disap-

pointment and shame, exist, except in story-books. He had felt a huge kindness for the little girls; they were almost pathetically bright and confident; they were as selfish as a mediæval devil, but they were innocent in intention as the ribbons that decorated them; they had no souls; one might as reasonably blame a spring blossom for a lack of soul. He discovered in himself somewhat the same attitude toward Howard. Something had been left out of Howard — the something that would have made him responsible; he was not a man; he was mere flesh and blood and clothes; he was a human being simplified, as a girl is simplified; it would not be homicide to kill him, it would be cruelty to animals.

Howard straddled a straight-backed chair and rested his chin on his arms, absolutely like a boy at college. There was something vulgar, almost blackguardly, in a man who remained as jaunty as a boy. When he had looked at Alan a minute in silence, he laughed.

"It's up to me, all right," he said; "if it wasn't, I should not be here. Your hand looks like a bluff or four aces: whatever it is, I have come to call you."

"I fancy it's a royal flush," said Alan.

"There isn't any such thing as a royal flush in politics before the day of election. Until the votes are counted a man may always draw fresh cards. But seriously, you have taken a lot of trouble to bring me here. Here I am. What is it you want?"

"I don't know that I cared particularly whether you came or not," said Alan; "you came to please yourself, not to please me, I fancy."

"Comes to the same thing; it pleases you that it should please me to come. What is it you want?"

"I want a man in Washington who will do what I tell him. Or rather, I want a man who will care for the same things that I do."

"And that man is not myself."

"I don't know; I'm not sure; it remains to be seen."

There was an element of falsehood in Alan's statement that he wanted a man anywhere who cared for the things he himself cared for; he wanted a man who cared for the things he himself felt that he ought to care for,—that he would care for if he cared for anything. There are things for which a man cares really, and things for which he cares officially, and the man is happy only when the two are in effect the same. Officially, Alan cared for a multitude of things; officially, the blessed tradition of his countrymen, that a man to be a man must be in earnest about something, kept him active; he could not have gone through his day with more energy if his success had been a matter of life and death to him. After the fashion of the American in general, he minded his business with intensity, out of sheer lack of imagination; there was nothing else to do—except to meditate on the lack of anything else to do, which breeds melancholy. Howard was not the man he would have chosen if wishes were men, or could bring forth men; there was no man he would willingly choose; there were men only who could be managed; the question was whether or not Howard was such a man.

"I lay my cards on the table," Howard said. "If

you really have not come to a decision, I'm willing to give you time. There is a year yet before the convention. If you have come to a decision, and against me, I shall block you if I can. You are either with me or against me; I am either with you or against you; I have come to find out which. Right or wrong, I shall make up my mind, before I leave this room, where you stand. You'll own that is 'talking,' as *hoi polloi* say."

"You may do exactly as you please," said Alan, offering a box of cigars; "I suggest, however, that you invite me to dinner. The plain truth is that the things you have done don't hold together, so far as an outsider can see. If you are willing to talk them over with me, the chances are that I am for you rather than for any one else. If you will not talk them over, or if when you have I am not satisfied, I shall look out for some one to replace you; in all honesty, I haven't at the moment an idea whom."

"This is Saturday; will Monday at seven do?"

"Perfectly."

There were half a dozen guests at the dinner Monday evening: Rhoda Hansley, whom Cecily had begun to champion since she had found it easier to plan a novel than to write it; Willis Lambert, who at the moment found it indispensable to domesticate himself in any house where Miss Hansley was staying; Mrs. Orwin, amateur in social lions, who claimed Miss Hansley, her niece, as her especial cub, and chaperoned her in her goings and comings, somewhat to the inconvenience of Herbert Orwin, who was not of the least importance,

except, naturally, as a signer of checks; Hugh Mayne, a college chum of Alan's and Howard's, who tried, like a good fellow, not to regret that his native land was not at war with some one so that he might command a regiment, and who in the meantime served as the *Chronicle's* special correspondent at the front when any one else was good enough to begin a war, and spent five times his pay in securing and forwarding the earliest news; Herbert Bland, who was the proper person at the moment to paint one's portrait, because he could transfigure the vulgarest physiognomy and give it distinction; Mrs. Crewe, who secured the rights of French plays for the American stage and supervised their translation, their modification to bring them within the requirements of the police power, their production. The conversation was of the sort that Alan good-naturedly detested. There were anecdotes in which the dramatic element was of less consequence than the names of the people concerned; anecdotes that would have been pointless if they had been told of A or B — of the man in the cars. There were humorous short stories, a succession of them, each "capping" its predecessor, each "delivered" with a respectable amount of talent and training in elocution and mimicry. There were pleasant things and pleasant places named, sometimes with a word that evoked an image; there were sentences made, that had the merit of being quotable, on the latest book, the latest exhibition of pictures, the latest discovery of chemistry, the latest *débutante* in society and on the stage, the latest social gossip, the latest quotation in the market, the

latest political news. But the whole was *décousu*, unstitched—as disconnected, and as interesting, as the paragraphs in a joke-book; a symbol of the lack of genius for intimacy in a people who find a social resource in ices and after-dinner speaking. A word of autobiography, a moment of self-betrayal, would have been a relief to every one. But humour is self-conscious; the racial sense of fun enables every one to see himself in advance as others will see him, and no one “gives himself away” in a mixed company. Alan himself possessed a natural aptitude for the sort of dinner-talk that his countrymen demand; but he found time, while speaking and listening, to remember certain evenings in Urrey’s rooms when the men, four of them there present, had confessed themselves, and borne witness to the faith that was in them, with a fulness of detail and a sincerity that made their present exhibition little better than a grimace.

There were good things to eat and drink on the table, things to gratify a gourmand “by predestination,” in the phrase of M. Brillat Savarin; there was in particular an “All Saints” of 1794 that could not be bought; but no one had time or attention for meat and drink; every one was polishing an epigram. There were celebrated bits of silver on the table, bits of pottery on the sideboard and the walls that connoisseurs describe and catalogue and make a journey to examine; but no one in the company had leisure to take account of them. The dinner was a *chef d’œuvre* of waste, of barbarism, a sacrifice to a barbarous etiquette, — barbarous because it was invented for

people who would be decent only on condition of not being natural, and because every one about the table was what he was expected to be, and no one could "get his own consent" to be as charming as, the demands of etiquette apart, he would gladly have been in being himself. They were civilized people living under a tradition of barbarism. The barbarian is essentially a man who cannot show himself as he is without offence; he is harmless only by convention. Alan scrutinized the company. Rhoda Hansley could have delighted every one there present by a confession. She was supposed to be that speculative thing, a woman who does not want to marry, and had had a Platonic friendship with Gilbert Rennison, who was alleged to have written her books. The proof was that she had published nothing since he died. Willis Lambert was Gilbert's executor. He was also a collector of epigrams to the discredit of the fair sex. His outward devotion to Rhoda had been made the subject of bets. It had been wagered that he would ask her to marry him; the odds against were five to one. It had been wagered that he followed her simply because she suggested the epigrams that were necessary to make his collection complete. Unhappily he was a melancholic, and therefore a scholar, and could talk with authority of half a dozen things that did not interest him. Hugh Mayne had seen queer things in out-of-the-way places, and Bland had seen queer things in well-known "sitters," and they, and every one, chose to talk of people whom they did not know well, because to talk of people whom they did know well, including them-

selves, would have been an indiscretion. Alan's hostess did not talk at all. Her face, like all the faces at the table, was interesting to Alan because it was the face of a contemporary; Alan was interested in his contemporaries; they were the generation just coming into power; they were the new world; the man who could divine them could govern them; the man who could divine himself could govern them, for they were his people, they belonged to him, and he to them; they were accessible to the same ideas, to the same passions, they spoke and could be spoken to in the same language, a language distinct from that of all generations preceding, the power of which was still a mystery to the generation at the moment in possession. Her face, like all the faces at the table, was interesting absolutely, because it was a face with a prediction in it; a face which indicated but did not define a type that would one day be archaic and historical, the face of the American of the first quarter of the twentieth century, which would be a document to be read in connection with the remaining records of the national life of the generation to which it belonged. Her face, unlike the face of any one else, was interesting to him as that of a woman by whom he had been dominated. He had never been dominated by any one else, man or woman. The almost amazing frankness which he had found in her beneath her conventional manner of reserve seemed to have given place to an aloofness that repelled. She looked misanthropically indifferent; in spite of her warm curves and warm tints she looked physically cold. In spite of the fact that she had as yet no lines in her

face, she looked as she might when the lines should have become perfectly defined ; in spite of the fact that her face was fresh and full, she looked haggard and preoccupied. Alan wondered whether she had not been a "success." He had seen that same look in the face of *débütantes*, late in their first season, when, for no reason obvious to themselves, they had failed of success, and when they had taken refuge in pride. They had failed in the first instance from pride ; they had not consented to know how to solicit attention by catching the eye, by the seemingly chance word dropped in raillery, by an inviting attitude. Alan wondered if Cecily had not been a success. It was a success, in her world and in his, merely to have captured Howard. He could easily conceive her ruining any success in that line, however, out of sheer pride ; and he still found in her face, however haggard and however old, something of the frankness and the high spirit which had dominated him.

XLIII

ALL Howard's guests were stopping at Lidcott, and he found no difficulty in disengaging himself at an early hour for his "business" with Alan. He had not prepared himself, seemingly, for so searching an inquisition as his schoolmate submitted him to. Alan began at the beginning, and required an account of Howard's movements step by step. After a bad quarter of an hour Howard rang for a servant and asked Mrs. Lidcott to excuse herself and to come to the library. Until the dinner a few moments before, Alan had not seen her since her marriage. He had seen Howard; but he had avoided becoming on terms of intimacy with him. She came in with a look of inquiry and of animation which Alan had missed in her at dinner. James Lidcott had consulted a competent bibliophile when he had collected his books; the bibliophile had been recommended by his architect, and the choice confirmed by Howard; he had no reason to blush, in his grave, for his library. Howard repeated to Cecily Alan's questions, and she answered them off-hand. Her face became animated as she spoke. Alan made his questions more searching; she answered with an exactness in regard to dates and names, draughts and final draughts of documents, which he forgot to be astonished at, till he reflected on it afterwards. He soon

ceased to put his questions even nominally to Howard ; Howard became little more than a spectator, who had a word to suggest now and then. When papers were produced to complete her statements, the originals were almost entirely in a handwriting not Howard's ; and alterations in Howard's writing were everywhere crossed out, and condemned in curt marginalia explaining why the first words must stand. A dozen times an impulse shaped itself in Alan to ask Cecily if the writing were not hers. He checked the impulse for the moment, in the first instance because he thought it indiscreet, in the second because he found it unnecessary. If she had not written the papers before him, she had dictated them ; at every moment she supplemented them by amplifications that showed them as details in a firmly conceived policy. Howard was a thousand miles behind her in a knowledge of what that policy was, or rather had been ; for there came a point in Alan's inquisition when Cecily no longer had a word to say and the answers came from Howard. Before that point, Howard's words of assent, dropped from time to time, served only to expose the incompleteness of his grasp of what she was talking about. In a dozen instances she openly corrected him. She forgot, while she was speaking, that she had been his agent and his subordinate ; she declined retrospectively to accept an attitude of subordination in regard to what had been her own work ; her defence was a defence of herself, an exposition of her own ideas and of the circumstances and difficulties in which she had carried them out ; she was proud of them, and not ashamed of herself ; she did not believe

that any one, humanly speaking, could have had better ideas, or in the actual circumstances served them more loyally: the thing was plain to Alan as he listened. She had no apologies to make, no regrets to offer for anything; she was willing — she was glad — to be questioned, precisely because she had her answer ready, and was proud of her answer.

Alan took home a satchel full of documents, and spent half the night, or rather half the morning, in mastering them. The conclusions that he reached were reasonably accurate by the time he had read to the end. He had known before he began to read that there were two well separated epochs, an earlier and a later manner, in Howard's "record." On mature reflection he found Cecily simply the most admirable creature in the world. He was no longer a boy who could lose his head, he told himself, but "God had put her together regardless of expense," in the vernacular. She had ceased to be a delicately modelled girl of the unathletic type; she had become a beautiful woman in whom none of the delicate modelling of her girlhood was lost, and there had been a judicial intelligence in what she had written and said, full of male qualities and regard for male virtues. He would have respected, yes, and admired, a man who had done what she had done, and who justified it as she had justified it. In spite of his instinctive misogyny, he acknowledged that it made a difference to him that she was a woman. He had asked her once to be his wife; he had never been sorry or ashamed that he had asked her; at the moment he was rather proud.

It had been arranged that he was to see her the next morning. The sitting had been more prolonged than any of them had anticipated, and the reply to a number of Alan's inquiries had been postponed. He found her in a room the walls and ceiling of which had been made for her by Menpes, who had also done a portrait of her. The room was a treasure and full of treasures. At the time of her marriage, Alan had wondered why, of all men in reason in the running, she had chosen Howard; his wonder had returned upon him the evening before as he had listened to her, and watched her, and read the work of her hands and intelligence — yes, and of her passion and ambition; passion and ambition were in her every look and word. He himself could have given her as Howard could not, what, it seemed, she wanted; he cared for the purposes for which she cared, as Howard did not; he was the embodiment (he was frank with himself — why not?), as Howard was not, of her ideals. That morning, as he met her, he felt his wonder checked. She was more many-sided than he had guessed; she had a woman's barbarian idolatry of "things." A suspicion came to him as he met her, that she had married Howard for his money; not in the vulgar sense, not consciously, not blamably at all. A child loves its nurse or its mother, as a dog loves its master, for benefits bestowed; the child and the dog are helpless; the nurse, or mother, or master, is well-nigh omnipotent; the love is a good, honest love, capable, in case of need, of perfect gratitude and life-and-death generosity. A girl is only less helpless than the dog or child, and may, with the same naïve honesty, with

the same gratitude that will stand proof in time of need, love the man who chooses to serve, who chooses, and who has the power, to give her everything she wants. If Cecily wanted beautiful things, Howard could supply her with them in a profusion that was impossible to Alan. Every object in the room was a delight and a little masterpiece. To be sure, a room in which every object was a delight and a little masterpiece had a tendency, if one were susceptible to such things, to distract the attention; working in such a room, it occurred to Alan, would be the same kind of bad economy and bad form as discussing metaphysics, or the price of stocks, in the Salon Carré. But he had a retrospective sense of fun in his own blindness to Howard's possible merits.

"What a charming room," he said, taking her hand; "it is as much a desecration to talk business here as to eat one's lunch in a museum."

He did not say that there was nothing in the room so charming as herself, and no little masterpiece in it of a more winning loveliness than the hand she gave him. It had not one attribute of the conventionally perfect hand except its suppleness and softness. It was not dimpled; it was not strikingly small; it was not strikingly slim; it was not strikingly white; it was an unconventionally perfect hand; it was a delight to look upon, in texture and colour and form.

She was frankly pleased in his pleasure in the room.

"Yes," she said; "I like it, too; though I don't see why it is a desecration to talk business in it, nor for that matter to eat one's lunch in a museum. I have often

wanted to eat my lunch in a museum; and because I could not, have gone without my lunch. The lunch would have been the better for the pictures and statues round about — just as a dinner is better for flowers on the table. Sit in that chair; it is more comfortable than it looks; the others are more comfortable to look at than to sit in."

"I had not thought of orchids on the table; I was thinking — simile for simile — that to get together a room like this to talk business in, was like putting on evening dress to wash the breakfast dishes."

She did not insist upon the loveliness of her room or upon her simile; she was possessed with a message and with an impulse to deliver it.

"There are a dozen things I left unsaid last night," she began, "because they did not occur to me. It may shorten your list of questions if I say my dozen things at once. Or rather, I want to say them and shall not be at peace until I have."

Alan had no questions to ask, except questions, which he could not ask, about herself; the documents in his possession had told him all he cared to know about Howard; but he was very willing to hear her talk. She did talk for more than an hour; she gave an orderly exposition, point by point, of everything she had done; she forgot herself and him; he forgot her, at times, and Menpes's room; she gave grave reasons, she made sentences which a little embarrassed her because they were so good. She smiled nervously when she turned them out, and tried to break their force by softening phrases — "Of course," and "It was common report," and "As

every one must have known." She was shy of talking common sense, or rather uncommon sense, because she was a woman; she was instinctively on her guard lest it should be unfeminine. It was unfeminine; it was neither female nor male; it was purely intelligent. A rush of pity took possession of Alan as he listened; if she had been a man, there was nothing that with her patience, her diligence, her insight, she could not have achieved; and her hunger for achievement vibrated in every word. Her care for "things" was a side-issue, a detail in a care for perfection; she had used Howard as an instrument, not the best conceivable, but the best, all things considered, that offered itself to her hand, and had loved him as an instrument. She cared for great things, and a woman who cares gravely for great things, and who "understands," is a great woman.

When she had finished, he left his chair; he took a turn about the room.

"I beg your pardon," he said, sitting down again; "I don't know how to speak to you. It is ridiculous to address you simply as a charming woman and the wife of a man who was my friend; you are so much more. It is ridiculous for me to praise what you have done, and have said in explanation of it; I am not in a position in which my praise is of consequence to any one, least of all to you. But privately, I do praise what you have done and said; and if you were a man, I should tell you so, and should be glad to 'back' you, should ask to back you. I do not see why your being a woman should make a difference, unless you see why it should. You are not

a woman ; you are one of a certain clan, of my clan, to whom I owe a clan loyalty."

She was not concerned primarily with the compliment, though she recognized it, and liked it ; she recognized it and liked it as a man might have done ; he had noticed in her before an absence of feminine coquetry. She was not thinking of him ; she was thinking of what he had been talking about ; and her face fell into the haggard lines that he had noticed the night before.

"No," she said, "I am not a woman. I am not a man either, it seems ; worse luck."

XLIV

ALAN carried his documents and his conclusions to Urrey, whom he expected hugely to surprise. Urrey declined to be surprised; he listened after the first few moments with a look of fun in his eyes.

"The thing's as plain as my hat; she's been the whole show from start to finish," said Urrey. "I knew way back there while you were in Timbuctoo that Howard had tapped a private wire. He used to drop in here and say things that had 'stolen goods' written all over them. And I was three-ply idiot enough at first to think they belonged to him. I gave the animal credit for a turn for reflection."

"She's simply stunning," said Alan, meditatively. "Fancy her sitting over there in Kentucky with her dolls and her 'sampler' (by the way what is a sampler?), and getting by sheer divination the notions that we have raked heaven and earth, literature and the slums, with a fine-tooth comb, to find."

"Alan, thou art dithyrambic," said Urrey, conscious that he was noted for a hard head; "that fine-tooth-comb metaphor, which by the way is both colloquial and unpleasant, bespeaks inebriety. 'Sheer divination'—my great-aunt! She got the notions, that transfix you with admiration, from yourself, all right, through How-

ard. Of course Howard swaggered about you; he may even have swaggered about me; he certainly swaggered about the *Chronicle*. She took the notions that he gave her, and having none of her own, was mistress of perfect leisure to put them together and make a whole of them."

This speech offended Alan, or rather, almost outraged him.

"Jimmy, your misogyny is disgusting," he said. "I'm not a champion of the female *qua* female, myself; but I can recognize exceptions. Howard is as incapable of reporting ideas as he is of putting them together. You should have seen him when I began to cross-examine him. He thought it a thousand years till he could press a button and get some one to answer for him."

"She's a remarkable woman, straight enough," Urrey admitted; "it would take a remarkable woman to get any one's ideas through Howard and to put them together and make a whole of them. It is passably absurd, by the way, the extent to which females have 'cut ice' in our concerns, in spite of us. It was my mother who made the governor give me a chance; it was your mother, I fancy, who pushed you; it has been Miss Windet who kept the *Chronicle* for us; and a girl who made Howard. I always did believe in mothers; mothers is 'good people'; but these two other cases are supererogatory."

The introduction of Isabel's name into this list displeased Alan, though he could not deny the fact upon which Urrey based her claim. Also he was accustomed to Urrey the bachelor; he would find a painful readjust-

ment necessary before he could become accustomed to Urrey the lover.

"You like my cousin a lot," he hazarded.

Urrey laughed.

"Sure," he said. "She too is 'good people.' I have not worked with her so long without noticing that she has done in every case about as nearly the right thing as it is humanly possible to do."

Alan had an instant's temptation to adjure him in God's name to marry her out of hand. He wanted her out of his way. He had likewise an instant's temptation to adjure him, when he had quite made up his mind to marry her, and got her consent, to blow his brains out. What in a measure delivered him from both temptations was a belief that, when Urrey chose to go a-courting, he would not seek advice from any one, and would resent advice thrust upon him.

"You are too good for her, old man," he said. "Mistress Isabel's husband will find that she has a knack of getting her own way, in particular when her own way happens not to be his. The betting is dollars to doughnuts he would find the situation unpleasant. In the meantime, Howard, with Mrs. Lidcott to help him, is just what I want. I would give dollars, or doughnuts, myself, on demand, to know just why Mrs. Lidcott quit her job when she did, and in what circumstances she can get her own consent to take it up again."

"You'd better ask her," said Urrey, satirically.

"Jimmy," said Alan, "you think you are frivolous, but you are inspired. I will."

The day following Howard gave a "picnic," to which both Alan and Urrey were invited. Howard was a past-master in the art of keeping people occupied and therefore amused. He had descended that morning on a farm-house and filled it with servants and silver. He was an amateur of eating and drinking, as James Lidcott had been before him, and gave his personal attention to the details of preparation, not so much out of a distrust of his *chef*, as out of a delight in concerning himself with pleasant things. He found the same happiness in the presence of choice viands and rare wines that Cecily found in the presence of choice stuffs from the loom and rare colour-effects in decoration. He had chosen the farm-house for a picnic years before; and would as little have forgotten it as a brand of cigars. There was a grove of hickories, there was a brook, there was a view, there was a level space on which he had had a floor laid for dancing. He lingered over the task of preparation till the last possible moment, toward two in the afternoon, and did his utmost to make an automobile record to the "meet" where he was to find his guests.

The picnic was perfect, though Cecily contributed little as a hostess to its success. Howard was both host and hostess. Alan saw plainly what had been her rôle in Howard's success in Washington. She had not been a social nonentity; she was too strikingly good to look at; she was too clever and abundant in speech, when she was spoken to. But she was much inclined to wait to be spoken to before she herself spoke at all. In a mixed company she was possessed by a huge inertia. She

could find the right word, if the word were asked for; she could say the right word to the right people, if the right people came to her; but she was indisposed to seek any one; she was perfectly content to sit or to stand where chance had placed her, and to watch, with shrewd, bright, non-committal eyes, whatever happened to lie before her. For all her gentleness and cordiality, her utter kindness and frankness, in actual speech, she looked aloof; she looked as if she were holding something back, she looked as if she were thinking of something else, possibly to the discredit of her interlocutor. Alan conceived that it might well make a man, or a woman, uncomfortable to be subjected to a scrutiny in which there was so much impersonal, untrammelled intelligence. Howard had been, as Urrey would say, practically the whole show, as far as his success in Washington had been social. She had done her work in silence, in solitude, over Congressional Reports. The expected relation between ambitious man and wife in their case had been reversed. It was she who had done the drudgery; it was she who had supplied the patient male intelligence; it was he who had supplied the "frills."

Alan found no reason to revise this judgment when he had got Mrs. Lidcott, who said she did not dance, to stroll to the brookside with him, and to take possession of one of the rustic seats Howard's forethought had provided, and watch the rippling water. He found reason only to add a second judgment to the first. He turned the conversation deliberately upon Washington and the men and women she had met there. She replied to each of his

questions with an analysis that was not offhand. She had studied the people of whom she spoke as instruments to be used, as obstacles to be overcome; she did not find phrases for them as she talked, she had not set herself the task of coming to a definitive opinion about them for the first time; she quoted, from memory, phrases that had long since been found to record a deliberate judgment — phrases which, whether right or wrong, were in no further need, from her point of view, of revision. They were accurate records of thinking she had done long since, and had acted upon. The analysis was of a sharpness that had the effect of wit, that was wit; but her face and manner betrayed no sign that she was conscious her words were amusing in themselves. She had the appearance of dealing with a grave subject gravely, as indeed she was. A number of the points she made Alan found of use, both at the moment and afterwards. What took him by surprise was her unreserve in supplying him with them. She trusted him as absolutely as if he belonged to her. It added to his admiration of her that she was right in her trust; he was incapable of using her confidence against her, and she must have known just that; if she had been as open with every one as she had been with him, both she and Howard must have been ruined within six months.

He doubted Urrey's notion that she had got her ideas through Howard, and that the ideas were his own. She had ideas herself; she was full to the point of bursting with ideas; she made him a present of them with a generosity which took him by surprise; she did not care, after the manner of the majority of men whom he met,

and detested, primarily for her proprietorship in an idea; she cared for the idea; she cared to see it prevail. She wanted it put into practice; she was eager to give it to any one who was in a position to put it into practice. She would have told her most treasured inspiration to the "man in the cars," if the man in the cars had been in a position to carry it into effect. Also he doubted his notion, as he listened, that it was a matter of indifference whom a man married, if he were condemned to marry at all. He felt no temptation to disloyalty to Nannie. Nannie was a good little woman, better than he, or any man he knew, deserved. Neither Nannie nor himself was concerned in the case. He was considering the case abstractly, impersonally; and abstractly, impersonally considered, he frankly confessed that it seemed to him to make all the difference in the world whether a man had married Cecily Elderlin or some one else. There seemed to be a great deal to be said for the literary tradition that personal relations are the big things in life. He was thrown suddenly back on a scrutiny of his own case. He had spent month after month in Paris, in a state of utter dismay; he had been dead-alive; certainly not because he found it intolerable to ask Nannie a question which he perfectly expected she would answer with a negative, though he had found the pretence involved in just that question disagreeable enough; certainly not because he found it intolerable to seem to Cecily to have carried his light love over night to some other woman, though he had disliked that too. He had spent month after month, not to say year after year,

since his return to Estcourt, in a state not far removed from utter dismay. He had been more "hard hit" even than at first he knew by Cecily's refusal. Her refusal had taken something out of him; something that, as he looked back on it, had been the best thing in him — his fulness of life, his boundless sense of fun. He had learned pain from her, and the stolid stoicism that can endure pain. He was not angry with her when he made the discovery; he was grateful. Life is not a game; it is a grave business; it had been owing to wholly exceptional circumstances that even as a boy he had found it possible to regard life as a game; and it was she who had taught him that his circumstances had been exceptional; it was she, he recognized, who had made a man of him. He had his doubts to-day, however, whether it was in truth so much the better for a man, and for every one else, if he did not find ecstasies in his home, — whether it was in truth but one distraction less from his work out of doors, where he belonged. He conceived the possibility that it might be precisely in the ecstasies in his home that a man might find his strength to do his work out of doors as a man should. Certainly he had not found that strength in himself; certainly Howard had not found that strength in himself; and Alan reflected with a grim amusement and surmise on Urrey's words about Isabel. He found the notion unendingly comic that any man could find inspiration and comfort in Isabel. And yet he was disposed to be humble about his notions of inspiration and comfort, and where a man might find them.

XLV

"You will be glad to find yourself back in Washington," he said, when at last she paused; "you know the people as if you had made them, and the fact that you did not make them must make it rather good fun to manage them — to guess, and find your guess verified, or even not verified."

"I do not go back to Washington this coming winter," she said; "I spend the winter in my father's house, at Soames; I have given up politics for a book, which I am afraid, by the way, will not be a good book; though it shall be the best I can make it. I had an idea when I began that it is as easy to make a book as to make a cake. And perhaps it is; only if it is, I find it uncommonly hard to make a cake that shall be worth the eating."

It startled Alan to hear her say that she would not return to Washington. It presented a difficulty in the way of the idea that he had been turning over. He was sceptical of her devotion to literature, though not at all sceptical of her ability. She had a gift for words; she had had people who were worth while before her eyes, and had used her eyes; but there was all the difference in the world in the animation of her manner, when she had explained and defended the first years of Howard's public conduct, and when she spoke of her book. He

had accepted Urry's guess, that she had left Howard to his own devices at the time of the investigation into the A. A. & B. There could be no doubt that she had started the investigation, and that in the early stages of it she had ceased to take any interest whatever in it or in any of Howard's affairs; the date in his career at which Howard, two nights before, had ceased to have practically nothing to say for himself, and had become plainly the first authority in regard to details, made uncertainty impossible. Alan had accepted also a guess of his own, since he had come to know her, that she had been piqued by James Lidcott's appearance in the investigation of the A. A. & B. and by Howard's lack of a romantic Roman virtue in refusing to be actively concerned in an investigation in which his father's honour was the subject in doubt. He still held Howard's conduct in the investigation to have been admirable. He was still enough of a misogynist to say to himself that women take ideals, not as points of the compass to enable a man to lay a course, but as rules of conduct each wholly obligatory, quite forgetting that each partially conflicts with all the rest. But while his misogyny sufficed to explain to his satisfaction her refusal to manage Howard's affairs, it did not suffice to explain her disinclination to live under the same roof with him. He wondered whether she had pressed her objection to Howard's dislike of taking an active part in the investigation to the point of a quarrel with him.

"To give up life for a record of life or for a comment on life strikes me as rather an unintelligent exchange,"

he said. "I haven't a word to say against the dignity of literature. The modern man of letters is, or may be, a sage, a priest, and a hero, all in one, who teaches by precept because the opportunity to teach, at least so widely, by example is denied him. But after all it is better to be a hero than to describe a hero, and to be a personage than to describe a personage."

"And Agamemnon was greater than Homer, and Hamlet greater than Shakespeare," she said.

Alan laughed at her quickness and keenness.

"Oh I say, I've a right to choose my own instances to back up my own propositions. Let Homer and Shakespeare alone; they are able to take care of themselves. What I mean, in a general way, is that Washington and Hamilton are head and shoulders taller than any biographer of them; and in particular that it is important to make you, or rather keep you, a member of Congress. I want you to go back; you may be as much of a Homer or Shakespeare as you find convenient; I want you to be a member of Congress too."

"What you mean," she asked, "is that if I do not go, you will not back up Howard?"

Alan found this question embarrassing: a centre shot, as he phrased it. But he was not disposed to be balked by a question of etiquette, or to deal with her with less than her own directness.

"I mean," he said gravely, "that if you will go back and act with him, as it is plain by his own willing testimony the other night, in sending for you, you have acted with him before, I will back him up gladly. If

you do not act with him, I don't know whether I shall back him up or not. I have taken it for granted that you would."

She stared for a minute at the rippling water and broad boulders, at the burdocks and banks of violets, purple, white, and yellow, beyond.

"You take too much for granted," she said; "I shall not go back."

"It is possible that I have taken too much for granted, though I have not done so lightly," he replied. He was bent upon prevailing with her, if the thing were possible. He was not to be made to desist with one rebuff. He would at least run the risk of a reconnaissance in force; he would run the risk of a pitched battle, if necessary. "I have taken it for granted that you care for certain things a lot. Every minute that I talk with you impels me to take that for granted with a greater confidence. I ask you to do what you want done, and to let me help you. Or rather, I am not concerned with either your wants or mine; I am appealing to you in behalf of matters that in your own judgment take precedence of your wants and mine."

"I shall not go back to Washington," she said.

Alan was as obstinate, and as headlong, in his different way, as Cecil.

"I beg your pardon, I don't believe that you will not go back," he said tranquilly. "I believe I shall be able to convince you that you ought. In the first place, what do you fancy Howard's course likeliest to be if he acts without you? I ought to ask your pardon again, for

putting such a question, except that I am not concerned for the minute with Howard, or you, or myself."

She hesitated for an appreciable time. She knew perfectly what his question in regard to Howard meant. He was challenging her to confess that if she had been in his place she would not have backed Howard; or rather he was forcing her, in order to avoid accepting that challenge, to agree to take her position at Howard's side. He had no right to present her a dilemma like that, except the right that he had alleged: she was loyal to certain ideas. She avoided the dilemma by taking half of his question literally. She spoke of Howard impersonally, as she would have spoken of any one else.

"I do not believe I know Howard," she said, as if she were thinking this problem out. "I once thought him a boy in a 'four-in-hand,' whose horses had taken the bits in their teeth, and were running away with him. It is a strange thing, by the way, that a girl always thinks a man immature; I could never feel that papa was not immature, and even godpapa, Mr. Peyton, strikes me as just a little more grown up than men in general. I still think that Howard's horses were running away with him; but I think he had made them rear and plunge out of sheer daring and light-heartedness. I suspect he fancied that he could gain control of them at any minute, and I am not sure that his fancy was not true. He has his father's capacity; he has a talent for 'getting there'; he gets what he wants, and gets it easily, because he wants only one thing at a time. He is a creature who is perfectly simplified, so far as simplification makes for

strength, or rather for effectiveness. Given an aim that he has once proposed to himself and accepted, he has no obstacles within himself to overcome, no compromises to make, nothing to *ménager*; he goes at his mark as swiftly as a bullet from a gun; and if anything lies between him and his target, he tears through it, if he can. When I first knew him, I think the effect of lightness he gave was a part of his wanting disconnected little things. At present, I think he wants success in public life; a personal success only, if you like, but one in which no distinction of personal success shall be left unattained. That is of course simply my guess. I could not prove it in a court of law"

Alan was interested in her guess; he knew that life is regulated by guesses which could not be proved in a court of law. But he felt, while he listened, that she ought not to have told him her guess, and meditated afresh on a woman's disloyalty in little things, in particular in speech. She too was infinitely simplified, after the manner of women. She had spoken as if her whole concern in speaking must be to tell the truth. He was in effect, or might be, Howard's opponent, and she had said things incautiously that he might use against Howard.

The picnic ended in a ride home in the moonlight. Urrey, who was to pass the night at Estcourt, had strolled out to a summer-house as a preliminary to turning in, and was sitting on the railing of a balcony, watching the glint of the moonlight on the river. Alan had been pensive since his conversation with Cecily. He stood at

the moment holding in one hand a lapel of Urrey's coat, and dealing with the other soft body-blows in spots scientifically ascertained to be vulnerable.

"It is the greatest difficulty I know," said Urrey, "in the way of the thing metaphysicians call Crude Realism, that that river is bright all over and looks bright in only one path. Though that is not what I was thinking about. You monopolized the paragon all during the picnic. Socially speaking, I have met the paragon and been offered two fingers to shake. Since she left you, you have been as uncommunicative as a clam at low tide. It's up to you; I'd like to hear some of your conclusions."

"My conclusion, Jimmy, is that the big trio has talked a lot of nonsense about women in general, and in particular about nice women versus women like Dora Crispin."

"You announce the thing as if it were something new under the moon," said Urrey. "To the best of my belief that has been the deliberate judgment of my friend the sage, and of your friend the Philistine, ever since sage or Philistine has existed. Only the woman who makes a man discover a thing like that has got danger written all over her. Indeed, paragons in general is dangerous."

"Thanks," said Alan. "I don't know that I have ever made an absolute fool of myself. Certainly I don't intend to begin now."

XLVI

DURING his talk with Cecily at the picnic, on the rustic bench, Alan had laid before her a number of the things he planned to do and wished done. The next morning he received a letter from her which was less a letter than a document. She reviewed his plans; she criticised them; she offered suggestions; she abounded in evidence and reasons; she could not have been more explicit and exhaustive if she had been his colleague; she could not have been more open if she had been his partner; she could not have been more generous with her facts and her ideas if he had been her subordinate and she his chief.

That afternoon Mrs. Windet and Isabel, at Alan's request, paid Cecily a visit. Mrs. Windet was glad at any time to find things that she could do for Alan. She thought it one of the perfections in the universe that the time when a woman can still discover things that she can do and that her son wants done, does not come to an end. Isabel had known enough, and heard enough, of Mrs. Lidcott to be curious to meet her. Mrs. Lidcott was one of the pieces still on the board in Isabel's game; Isabel was concerned to know just what the value of that piece might be. While Mrs. Windet and Isabel were paying their visit, Thomas Peyton was closeted

with Cecil in the "office" in which Alan had spent so many bad quarters of an hour. What Peyton said to Cecil need not be recorded. He had loved Cecily as if she had been his own from the time she was a little thing who tottered in her steps, and sat down suddenly with a thud, and looked at him with trusting eyes as he came to set her on her legs again. He talked to Cecil as Cecil had never been talked to in his life; Mrs. Windet would have delighted to be present. The result of his talk was that Cecil meditated; the result of his meditation was that he put on hat and gloves and walked across the fields to Lidcott and sent up his card to Cecily. He was as tenacious, in his way, of his affections as of his ideas. He had never heard a word from Peyton since his boyhood that had not had weight with him. He had even begun to recognize, since Alan's marriage, that a man might own the *Chronicle* and still be human. The combination was a mystery to him, but he had come to accept the mystery; he had learned to respect Alan, although he did not pretend to understand him. He had come to feel somewhat old and miscellaneously charitable; he dimly suspected that there was a possibility that people in general might justly find it necessary to be charitable in their thoughts of himself. And the irrational affection that he had always found in himself for Alan had become more dominant as his friends dropped away or died, and as his own life drew to a close.

Cecily was surprised to receive his card; she had been consulted beforehand in regard to Mrs. Windet's and

Isabel's call. She found awaiting her a man whom she would have found interesting in himself, even if the lines of his face and figure had not irresistibly reminded her of Alan, and even if on many accounts she had not spent hours in wondering what he could be like.

"It is good of you to consent to see me, my dear; though I hope you will not be sorry to have seen me, before I leave," he said directly, not expecting her to take his hand. "Whether you are or not, I have come to do an act of penance, that I am glad to do before I die. I should have been glad to do it years ago, to your father, while he was alive; and should have done it, except that a man as he grows old postpones eating humble pie, and that Charles, like myself, was a man who had done what he thought right at the time, and was slow to see that a case has two sides. He was the best man I have ever known; the manliest in the things men admire, and in intention the kindest and gentlest. I do not pretend that I think him in no wise to blame in the quarrel between us; but I am sorry that I never told him what I now tell you; I tell you, because it is impossible to tell him; I have waited till it is too late. I should have waited still longer, I am sorry to say, if Peyton had not talked to me; I might have waited until it was too late even to come to you."

He had made his apology like a penitent, standing; he had disregarded her invitation to be seated; and she herself had received his apology standing. She could readily conceive that her father with his hot temper had been in part in the wrong. Whatever else might be found wanting

in Cecil's bearing and words, there was at no time a lack of sincerity. She could feel to the utmost the constraint that a man of Cecil's age and reticence must have put upon himself to come to her. In spite of her blue-stock-ing airs and her finding Howard immature, she was a kind little girl at heart, who was sorry for any one in pain. She did not speak; she took a step toward Cecil and offered him her hand.

He bowed above it and kissed it with old-fashioned gallantry. There were tears in his eyes when he lifted his head.

"You are a gentle woman, my dear," he said; "if I had not been a hot-headed fool, you would have been almost my daughter. God bless you, God bless you!"

Brigantine, who was visiting Estcourt at the time, called after Cecil's visit, and was particularly charming, Cecily thought; he knew no end of what she wanted to know; he had passed his life amongst beautiful things, and carried with him as sharp a vision of them as of the letters of the alphabet. He knew the biographies of pictures and statues; he knew the gossip about them that seldom finds its way into biographies; his talk was full of the names of things that it was a delight to her to hear named; he gave her "points" on the pretty things she herself had collected; he celebrated her taste and confirmed her judgment; he was abundantly learned, and found the right word to make his learning alive; he was gentle and weary and mundane; he was a bundle of gifts, and yet, as she knew, oddly ineffectual. He talked with her also about her father, praising him as Cecil had done.

It pleased and astonished her to hear men like Cecil and Brigantine praise her father. It gave her retrospectively a more generous picture of him. It magnified him, at the same time that it humiliated her. She had had him before her eyes for years, and in a manner had not noticed him. She had been taken by surprise by the things that had been said of him at the time of his death in the public prints. She recognized that they had not the accent of mere funeral-oration charity; she recognized that what they said was in effect manifestly true. She suspected, as she listened to Brigantine, that she possessed only what Peyton would call a lawyer's intelligence. She might live with a fact for a hundred years, even if the fact was a human being who was good to her, and never once give it a sympathetic understanding. She had always been preoccupied with notions and principles which, right or wrong, required an infinite knowledge of details to carry them intelligently into effect. She did not possess an infinite knowledge of details; no girl could unless some man helped her; she possessed sharply defined generalities; she had reasoned on them at the utmost with a mathematical accuracy; she hadn't a doubt that in more cases than she knew she had made a fool of herself. She did not want to be a fool in any case; she was ambitious of perfection.

Brigantine took her to see Nannie a few days after his visit. Brigantine was detached enough to be impartially aware that Nannie and Nannie's work were worth seeing. Cecily had already seen some of Nannie's work, and had been interested in it. She was interested besides in

Nannie because Nannie belonged to her own generation, and because her own generation struck her as the one thing in the world worth while of which she could possess an instinctive, special knowledge that could not be shared by observers of the generations before her or by the generations to come. She was an original authority on the people of her own time. She liked Nannie, though she was puzzled by her. She was puzzled by her honesty, by her animation, by her bitterness, by her ambiguous wit. There was a great kindness, beneath Nannie's bitterness, between her and Brigantine; there was a still greater kindness, Cecily was sure, between Nannie and Alan, who was present during her visit. Through Howard, Cecily had long since been possessed of Isabel's version of Alan's marriage. From Howard's account, she had conceived Nannie as a commonplace little girl, almost as an adventuress, with a talent at the end of her fingers for making things that took and deserved prizes. Nannie herself did not wholly fit the picture. She was a little fairy, Cecily said to herself; before she was lamed she must have been as delicately beautiful as a wild anemone. Cecily had never been called upon to face an exceptionally grave misfortune; she had always lived on safe lines; in a measure she had had luck. She was in no position to understand Nannie and her bitterness; but a great rush of pity for Nannie took possession of her as she looked and listened, and a great rush of pity for Alan. Alan seemed to her even more helplessly a boy than she had ever thought Howard. She had not known Alan half an hour before she recognized the part he played in

the "big trio." He had been from the beginning the originator, the organizer, the man who had conceived the idea and assumed the risks; she had surmised at once, that evening at Lidcott when she had been summoned from among her guests, that the ideas that had reached her through Howard had come to her from Alan; and her surmise had been confirmed at Howard's picnic, when she had met Urrey. Urrey stood solidly "on his own two feet," but he had not spoken to her five minutes without giving "credit" to Alan as his chief. Both he and Howard had won position and fame of a kind, as Alan's subordinates; Alan had won nothing, except a quarrel with his father, with whom he could not afford to quarrel, and a marriage with a woman whom, however charming, he had not wished to marry.

XLVII

ALAN had not in the least accepted Cecily's refusal to go to Washington. He had dealt with people before who had not known what they wanted till it had been explained to them more times than one. His next opportunity to speak with her came in the vigil on the eve of the feast of St. John the Baptist. Isabel had long been planning a dinner, to be followed by a ball, on Midsummer Eve. She had invited the prettiest girls she knew, and every one else whom she must invite in order to make the prettiest girls come. She had pressed every one who could be of use to her into her service, including Urrey, who was learned in customs and superstitions and became more learned under her management. She decorated everything, that could be decorated, with symbolic dragons and hobgoblins, because dragons and hobgoblins, for reasons known only to themselves, make a point of being particularly noxious on Midsummer Eve, and with green birch, long fennel, St. John's-wort, and white lilies. The guests arrived, the whole party at Lidcott and Thomas Peyton among the rest, dressed by request as shepherds and shepherdesses. At midnight, when the solar year begins — "June for junior," Urrey told Isabel, though she thought he was joking and heard him without conviction — there was a pause in the danc-

ing to see the sacred fires lit, the original bonfires; one to make trouble for the said dragons and hobgoblins, one to symbolize that St. John the Baptist is a beacon shining from afar, one to symbolize his martyrdom, a fourth, when it had burned low, to be leapt across to purify the leaper of the sins he had committed since Rogation Week. Peyton leaped nimbly, saying that there was a tradition, which was wholly slanderous, that a lawyer could not purify himself of his sins too often. Even Cecil leaped, being still in a penitent mood since his talk with Cecily. Mrs. Windet had declined to have anything to do with a shepherdess's costume, but with every one about her to urge her and Brigantine to guide her, she gathered up her skirts and crossed the fire, because she was good-natured and because she had once been young. Then there was a pyrotechnic wheel set rolling in a path prepared for it from Estcourt to the river, to carry away ill luck from every one who watched it; and then there was supper and more dancing.

Cecily stood in the background, amused, interested, observant, but, as Alan had noticed before, not "counting." Mrs. Windet had once been young; even Cecil had once been young; Cecily, it occurred to Alan, had been a blue-stocking in her cradle.

"I should like very much to be rid of my sins, but I cannot jump and I am afraid to burn my toes," she said to Alan; "I shall have to content myself with watching the wheel and getting rid of my ill luck."

"Oh, your sins! They date back farther than Rogation Week; you would burn your toes in vain. I have

been on the *qui vive* all the evening to discover a half-hour in which you would be at liberty to hear me talk of your sins. Come to the summer-house yonder; we can see the wheel from there; I, too, want to get rid of my ill luck."

She went with him to the summer-house in which Urrey had questioned him about the paragon. It was one of the charming things about her, and the secret perhaps of her lack of obvious effectiveness, that, with her absence of initiative, she was open to any suggestion; she could be got to do anything, or to talk of anything, that her companion of the moment wished.

"The particular sin of yours which lies heavy on my conscience," he said, "is that you hesitate to do what I beg you to. I should not think that sin half so black, if I were inclined to beg you to do anything that you did not really want to do yourself. Come, I haven't a doubt your book will be charming — a masterpiece; you could not do one that is not a masterpiece; you will win in a walk; but in spite of your superfluous compliments to Homer and to Shakespeare, literature is only a secondary affair with you; you will do it well because you have done something else better; your book will be full to the covers of politics, or of the things that go to make up politics. Look at the letters you have written me; you have been forced to write them out of a sheer disinterested interest; you have turned them out with an utter facility. The matter is one that lies beyond the range of impertinence, because the question is one of where you can do most good. Your literature, I suspect (I beg

your pardon), is a *tour de force* ; at the utmost it is or ought to be the occupation of your leisure ; in spite of yourself your heart is in the Capitol at Washington."

He had passed suddenly from the banter, in which he had begun to speak, to an accent of grave and challenging sincerity.

She watched the flaming wheel in silence till it reached the end of its path and was extinguished in the river. Isabel's guests formed in procession, carrying torches and a grand-opera dragon, and marched to the supper room, singing a carol, that Urrey had written and Brigantine set to music, in praise of wine, and in petition to St. John the Baptist, after immemorial custom, to pronounce his blessing on the same.

"I have been thinking about you and the things you ask, for some days, and intend to turn the tables on you," Cecily said. "It is you who have your heart, in spite of yourself, in the Capitol at Washington. You have had it there, so far as I can learn, ever since you were a little boy. It is you whose ideas both I and Howard, yes, and Mr. Urrey, have exploited from the first. We have added things of our own ; I myself am radiantly happy in the things I have added, and have not the least disinclination in the world to take all the credit that any one will give me for them ; I am a little glutton of praise and good report ; but like Mr. Urrey, I know my chief when I see him, and am concerned to give him 'credit' when credit is due him. It is you who must go to Washington ; you really want to ; you have never wanted anything else in all your life."

XLVIII

THERE were differences of opinion in Estcourt about Cecily; at least no two people said the same things about her.

"She is a dear and a princess," Nannie said. "She is a princess in a fairy tale that is not a romance. She is a princess in a fairy tale for whom no fairy prince has come. She is a princess who has always been, and will always be, the first person in her world, and therefore can do no wrong. She has been vaguely wistful, and sharply exasperated, but she has never had a bad conscience, and never had a real trouble: in connection with her the thing is unimaginable. She's as proud as an angelic Lucifer who has no intention of falling, and doesn't know what a temptation is. She is a blue-stock-ing, because she slept badly while the fairy prince, who is much to blame, delayed his coming; she had to read to while away the time. She is a dear because she liked me, and liked my pictures. *Voilà* — I know her as if I had made her, as indeed I have."

"Nannie," said Brigantine, "there are times when you are so French you are unfilial to your father, and undutiful to the Creator, who has never permitted anything, except phrases, to be made as definite as that portrait. Mrs. Lidcott, in common with the rest of the universe, is

not any one thing; she is a lot of things that cannot be described without being falsified. In particular she is the especially vague kind of thing we call nowadays mundane. I daresay she has gentle and kind impulses; I daresay she is as peppery as Lucifer; Elderlin's daughter could hardly help having kind impulses and being peppery; but she has a lot of other impulses that are not kind. Every one has, except me, who have not any. Behold, as Nannie would say, I have described her without falsifying her, and the last word of the description is mundane, which does not falsify because it does not mean anything in particular."

Nannie had got her trick of double irony from Brigantine. In his indecision in regard to matters in general, he found no other form of speech normal and natural.

"I don't think we can have met the same Mrs. Lidcott," Mrs. Windet said, laughing. "The Mrs. Lidcott I met was not a princess, and not a blue-stocking, and not superlatively, maturely, outrageously mundane. She was a nice, intelligent little girl not out of her nursery; she was interested in the fact that I had known her mamma; she thought it unnatural that I had not died before she herself was born; she regarded me as an extraordinary case of longevity in the human female; she had been put in long frocks because she had grown so tall that short frocks would not be proper."

"She is certainly ineffectual," said Isabel, as if she were making a concession; and then with a turn of the head: "Alan, you know her better than any of us: what is your opinion?"

"Mine?" said Alan; "mine is the opinion of the company as a whole, and of Nannie in particular: I think her simply 'out of sight'! She's out of sight in all senses. She's out of sight because she is not here, which is a pity; she would be interested in the things that have been said of her. She is out of sight because we none of us know what we are talking about. She is out of sight because we all of us know that she is charming, and extraordinary, and rather amazing. Behold, as Nannie and Brigantine would say, a learned exposition of current slang, puns thereon inclusive."

"Of course that is not an opinion; it is an evasion," said Isabel.

"Not the least in the world; it is my way of saying, brutally, that I like Mrs. Lidcott a lot," said Alan, "and that I fancy all the rest of you, except Nannie, would like her a lot if you knew her better. I except Nannie, because Nannie likes her a lot already."

Cecil was not present at this conversation. Nannie, who prattled to him with the confidence of a four-year-old, related it to him afterward, with such embroidery as her fancy suggested. Nannie told the truth, but in a language apart, which it needed a special training accurately to decipher.

"She is a sweet woman," said Cecil, simply and gently.

He was not thinking for the moment of Nannie and her narrative. He was thinking of Elderlin, with whom he had never become reconciled, with whom he did not see that he could have become reconciled, much as both

he and Elderlin would have liked a reconciliation. Of Cecily he thought as of Elderlin's daughter, and the woman to whom he had spoken his repentance.

Cecil was habitually simple and gentle with Nannie. He, like Elderlin, literally adored children, though, unlike Elderlin, he did not stand helpless in the presence of them. He thought himself called upon to consider what was for their future good; he felt toward them the responsibilities of a deputy-divinity. He felt in the same way toward men less fortunate than himself in birth, education, or material possessions, and toward horses and dogs, to whose training and wants he was also, with a certain rush of tenderness, attentive. He had thought of Nannie from the first as a child; he had thought of her, when she came to Estcourt crippled, as a child who would never cease to be a child, as a sick child, to whom a duteous severity could have no application. There was no future good in store for her; with her there could only be a question of present good; as a deputy-divinity he felt himself called upon not to discipline her, but to be indulgent to her. Nannie would have been tempted to find his fondness for her, his eagerness and delight when he could find anything she wanted, almost ridiculous, if she had not found it first of all, charming—yes, and pathetic. "You are dying to be loved, you dear, though you don't know it; you are dying, even, to say to every one that you are sorry, and will not do so any more, and will be little-boy good." A dozen times she found just those words on the tip of her tongue, and checked herself. He could

not say he was sorry, the poor dear, Nannie thought; with every drop of Gallic blood in her veins she thought, too, that it was not the part of an old man to say that he was sorry, to his wife and his son; least of all when no one could predict what his wife or his son would say in return, except that they would be formally "correct." Neither Mrs. Windet nor Alan were superficially "emotional" or "forgiving." They might be as slow as could be wished to take offence, but there came a time when they ceased to be interested in fresh evidence, even if the evidence took the form of an appeal. They were both of them "hard," Nannie thought, harder than flint and steel; all Americans were harder than flint and steel: hardness was a national characteristic: only there were degrees of hardness, even in hardness beyond that of flint and steel. Cecil, too, was hard, but not so hard as Mrs. Windet and Alan. He might have been at one time — she knew nothing of that; but at the moment he was old, and a little, the least in the world, "broken." He had the old man's habit of slowness, and rumination, and repetition, the old man's lack of alertness; and the lines on which he ruminated and the things he repeated were charming.

"She is a sweet woman," he repeated, after an interval; "and you are a sweet woman, my dear; I have often wanted to tell you so."

"Please don't resist the temptation at any future time, and *please* try to remember all the past times and tell them to me, historically," said Nannie; "I can't be told nice things about myself so often that I find

them unpleasant, or the people who say them to me hateful."

"Well," said Cecil, gravely, "I think I have wanted to say it to you every time I have seen you, since you became a woman at all. Before that time, I wanted to tell you you were a dear little girl. I believe I did."

Nannie's recollections confirmed his belief; and with the recollection came a rush of loyalty to him, and pity for his loneliness, and for her own.

XLIX

HOWARD had been much impressed by Cecil's visit to Cecily. He had known perfectly Cecil's attitude toward James Lidcott; he had known that Cecil would not willingly set his foot in James Lidcott's house; James Lidcott himself had told him so, laughing quietly. Neither father nor son thought Cecil a fool for his hostility; nor did they hate him for it; on the contrary they respected him. They both understood that scrupulousness is a luxury for which a man pays; they both understood also that success is a luxury, and that James Lidcott, being who he was, could not have achieved his success if he had observed Cecil Windet's scruples, or even such of them as he could conceive. It had been necessary for James Lidcott to choose, and he had chosen; he felt that he could afford to laugh—he had hit the mark at which he had aimed. Howard had not resented his laughter, though he had not joined in it. If he had been obliged to face the same choice, he would have chosen as his elder had; he would have chosen to become rich first and a gentleman afterwards: an impecunious gentleman was indulging himself in luxuries which he could not afford. Howard was frankly glad he was to possess the money, glad he was to possess all of it, glad too that he himself had not

been obliged to do some of the things by which it had been made. He was ready to take it with its disadvantages, and to recognize coolly its disadvantages as so many obstacles still to be overcome. He counted amongst other obstacles the aloofness of men like Cecil. Even as a lad he had known that he was doing a good thing for himself in making Alan his playmate; and at college had sedulously sought him out, and other men like him. When he had met Cecily, she had genuinely attracted him; every woman genuinely attracted him; but he had determined from the first not to ask any woman, no matter how much she attracted him, to be his wife, unless she was a woman whose position would be useful to him. He had seen from the moment when he met her that Cecily's position would be useful to him. He had seen, too, that the isolation in which she lived gave him an opportunity — "a chance" — which he could not expect to find often amongst girls of her station. She was not the first girl whom he had thought of as a possible Mrs. Howard Lidcott; only in the other cases he had found rivals who could plainly distance him, and he had been shy of risking a defeat. He had found no rivals in the running for Cecily's favour; he had had no prevision of the ineffectiveness in society which Alan had remarked in her; so far as he could see beforehand, she needed only to show herself in a ball-room to become the centre of soliciting beaux. After his marriage he had been in a measure disappointed in her; he had discovered, what Alan had discovered, that, considering her gifts, she was ineffective in a mixed

company. He had recognized, and even for a time exaggerated, the value of her services in the despatch of his business; but he had learned to reckon her socially as little more than a nonentity, except for the people who had known Charles Elderlin or the more creditable members of his family. Cecil's visit and apology to her had given him a more generous conception of what it might mean to a man to have married the daughter of Charles Elderlin; and in his judgment Cecily's "market quotations" rose accordingly.

He had been impressed, too, by Alan's gradual change of manner toward her as he questioned and listened and she answered, that evening at Lidcott when he had found it necessary to summon her from her guests. He had noticed how Alan singled her out at the picnic and the Midsummer Night's fête; he had noticed the accent with which Brigantine and the household at Estecourt in general spoke of her and addressed her; he suspected that her supposed social ineffectiveness had been a question only of *milieu*. The idea came to him — luminously, brilliantly — struck him with an impact that made him see stars — that she could help him where at the moment he most needed help. He was determined to find the help he needed at the moment, no matter where, no matter at what price. The portrait of him which Cecily had drawn for Alan had been inaccurate enough in some details; but it was perfect in the main. It was utterly true that, while he wanted everything, he wanted things in succession, one thing at a time, each for the time being supremely. His hard common sense assured him that a

man would be a fool to want things of consequence in any other way, if he was to make the last ounce of his power effective in obtaining what he wanted. It was utterly true that at the moment he wanted an uninterrupted career in Washington, and did not propose to leave any instrument to that end untried, which lay ready to his hand. If Cecily could help him, so much the better; her power to help was just so many bonds the more in his safe-deposit box. It was she who had thrust his ambition upon him; but for her he saw no reason to believe he would ever have thought of it; he would have been satisfied for all time to march behind Alan in the second rank with old Urrey; she had chosen a mark for him, she should help him hit it in the centre. He wanted with all the energy that was in him to hit it in the centre; not because he cared to hit that mark rather than another, but because he had undertaken to hit it. Any mark would have roused the same determination in him if he had determined to hit it. As for relying on her to be of use to him, men in every station in life had relied on their wives to be of use to them time out of mind. Chivalrous maxims were just so many politic, beneficent lies, invented to keep women in a good temper and in the highest state of effectiveness; they were comparable to the caresses one gave to one's dog, or to a horse just before a race; they made the woman think she was "the greatest thing that ever happened," and forced her to do her best accordingly. He was perfectly conscious that he possessed a wit and insight of his own; he had laughed in his sleeve at Urrey and Alan when they had

treated him hilariously as a feather-head. He could have done, he felt, the things on which they prided themselves, if he had found them necessary. He had never failed at least to accomplish by hook or crook anything that he had found necessary. He did not object in the least to Alan's admiration of Cecily; he wished there had been a thousand Alans to admire her; the more, the merrier; he liked to be envied; he liked to know that other people felt that he had distanced them; he liked Cecily the better for procuring him this pleasure. He gave Alan and every one else, cynically, every opportunity he could devise of affording him this pleasure, during the months of August and September. He would have resented an answering admiration on Cecily's part, but he had little fear of that; he had taken his measure of Cecily; she would never heartily admire any one except herself; she was selfish, self-centred, congenitally cold as a toad; her disposition to keep something back had been given her at birth as unalterably as the size of her head and the shape of her nose. There were women who could give themselves without reserve, who could dedicate themselves, and women who could not; and Cecily belonged once for all to the women who could not. He did not like the woman who could not dedicate herself; as a class, he was of the opinion that she had no reason for existence; but he had no inclination whatever on that account to loosen his hold on Cecily. He could distinguish between a class and a member of it; and besides, Cecily belonged to him. He had taken some pains to win her; he was wholly determined not to part with anything that was his own;

unless, naturally, he was offered in exchange something else that he judged on the whole more than equivalent. She had borne him no children, and had wished to bear none; he had wanted children; he wanted to found a family; a woman who did not bear children had no right to expect to be considered, except at her market value as a part of a man's live stock.

The end of the season for Howard and Cecily came in a week's house-party at Soames. Howard was obliged to return to Washington, and the party served as a house-warming for Cecily, who was to remain at Soames during the winter. Howard had long been anxious to open the house at Soames and to "entertain" there. He was acutely conscious that the Elderlins had been a fighting family in Ireland, with estates to lose or to preserve, in Cromwell's time, and that a Charles Elderlin had quitted the United Kingdom in disgust, and in a reasonable regard for his own safety, after the accession of William and Mary and the battle of the Boyne, and had settled in Virginia. He was acutely conscious that in remote times there had been a baronet amongst the Elderlins, who would have been a baron at least if James Stuart had not taken, or as seemed more probable been compelled to take, to his heels. He was acutely conscious that the Elderlins of Virginia had been people of the colonial great world, that they had sent their sons to be educated at Harrow and Oxford, that one of them had been on Washington's staff, that another of them, sent out West to explore the wilds of Kentucky, had chosen to remain there and had built a lodge, which he and his

descendants had spent three inherited fortunes in converting into a mansion and grounds with serpentine walks, straight alleys of tall trees, pavilions, embowered nooks, secluded lakes and waterfalls, rustic bridges, and artificial islands. Soames had been a "show place" in the state for three generations; four Presidents and Aaron Burr had been received and delighted there; it was an ideal place to which to invite a house-party. For the entertainment of his guests Howard organized, with characteristic profusion, a tennis tournament, a dog-show, a horse-show, races, hunts. The Soames grounds had always been noted for their fishing, and had been carefully stocked and preserved.

The evening after the festivities were at an end and the guests had gone, Howard and Cecily sat in the room in which she had received Dora Crispin; a room as severely "colonial" as Cecily could make it. Indeed, it had been colonial in her father's time; she had found little to alter or to add. Howard was to leave the next morning. They had congratulated each other on the success of their house-warming; they had compared notes in regard to their guests with the pertinence, point, and unreserve of members of the same household whose interests are in common, and who have none of the reasons that limit conversation for keeping things back. Each had brought the other up to date after a week's laborious hospitality; each had found the other good company.

"Talking people over afterwards — taking them to pieces and putting them together again when they are gone — are the ices and sweatmeats in the dinner of a

hostess," said Cecily, laughing; "we have been misbehaving ourselves shamefully."

"I find your comparison feminine," said Howard; "I should have said the cigars and liqueurs in the dinner of the host. We have not been misbehaving ourselves at all; we have only been talking history and memoirs. Besides, we have been doing by others as they do by us, which is good Old Testament morality."

"Cissie," he continued after a pause, "I have had a grave misfortune, and am a humble suppliant before you for a favour. I will kneel if you think the attitude *de rigueur* in the midst of these archaic clocks and chairs. My misfortune is that I find myself dead in earnest about wishing to be returned to Congress next year. I cannot imagine how the thing happened; it is ridiculous; but it is an accomplished fact. The favour I have to ask is, that you should do your best this winter to engage Windet on my side and to keep him there. He respects you and trusts you; you can help me no end."

There were blazing logs in the fireplace, and Cecily watched the flames for an appreciable time before she answered. She did not seem to have been listening.

"What a mistake you must think it," she said at last, "for a woman to be educated."

"I think you then the most charming mistake in the world, to say nothing of the most charming woman; though I don't in the least know what you mean by what you say. It strikes me, most blue-stocking Cissie, as all kinds of a *non sequitur*."

"Not at all. You know perfectly that I do not think

things right that you think right and that you do. You know perfectly that I do not think you ought to be in power in Washington; you ask me out of hand, as if it were the most natural matter in the world, to help to place you there."

Decidedly it was exasperating — it was maddening — that a woman should fancy she had ideas.

"Hang it all, a man and wife must stick together — they cannot help it; they are bound together. A man or woman marries as he joins a party or a regiment — yes, or is born into a given nation. When the thing is accomplished, he is at liberty to do his best to make the party or regiment or nation to his liking, but his first duty is loyalty. He must stand up for the decision of the party, he must obey the orders of the regiment, he must fight for the nation. And you cannot say that I am counting myself the party, the regiment, and the nation, by a large majority: I help you to do what you want in what primarily concerns you; you help me to do what I want in what primarily concerns me; that is 'log-rolling' all round."

Howard had profited by Cecily's throwing him over; he had learned to debate.

Cecily hesitated a moment; she had a vision of how simple Howard would have found his career if she had been an *édition de luxe* of the German *Hausfrau*. He would have been blissfully happy with a *Hausfrau*, and a *Hausfrau* would have been blissfully happy with him. She would even have thought him a great man among men.

"You speak of loyalty," she said; "friendship, too, calls for a certain loyalty, no less than a party or a regiment or a nation. You broke with your loyalty to Mr. Windet and Mr. Urrey. You broke with them because of a higher loyalty. You could do certain things, which all of you thought should be done, that in the circumstances they could not. I break with you, or decline to help you, because you will do certain things that I think ought not to be done."

"Cissie, you are wonderful, but you mix things up," laughed Howard. "I broke with Urrey and Alan because you told me to. I broke with them because you taught me the plain truth, which in my fantastic levity I never should have thought of, that a man has a right, even among friends, to look out for himself. I had worked for them; it was their turn to work for me."

Plainly Cecily was that despised thing, known in the States as a mugwump. A mugwump is a man who plays fast and loose with loyalties in the interest of notions.

"It is you who mix things up," said Cecily. "You can either take in regard to me an ultra-conventional or an ultra-unconventional point of view; you cannot take both. If you take the ultra-conventional point of view, you insult me, no less, by asking me to do my best to win Mr. Windet to your side and keep him there. I am not a female lobbyist; I am your wife. If you take an ultra-unconventional point of view, I am your equal and your friend, and have the same right that you have to look out for myself; that is, to count for the things I care for, and to refuse to count against them."

Yes, decidedly, Howard thought, it was maddening for a woman to have notions; she would never understand anything about anything; least of all when she could turn phrases.

"In effect," he said, "you decline to do what I wish."

"Absolutely," she said.

L

HOWARD's face was a picture of gathering wrath held in check. He was reflecting on the chances a man takes when he marries a modern woman.

"You say your 'absolutely' like a queen — as indeed you are; queen of Soames and Lidcott and outlying principalities," he said at last, colourlessly; "but even queens must put up with a beggarly approximation. At best you cannot get exactly the man you want in Washington. Where is there in the running any one more likely than your humble and obedient subject to be the man you want?"

Howard could at least keep his anger out of his voice. It needs a generation to achieve this conquest; when James Lidcott had been angry with man, woman, or child, he had used words that are unpublishable in American magazines. But Howard pressed his point. In the last resort, beneath whatever surface of courtesy, Howard was the dominant male.

In the relation that they bore toward each other Cecily found an element of effrontery in the accent of that speech: he well knew that she maintained an outward comradeship with him mainly from a sentiment of decency; he well knew that she could neither rule nor respect nor trust him, and that his gallantries were in

effect ironical. She felt also in his bearing, if not in his accent, his determination to insist. If she had been hard to win, she was still harder to intimidate.

"It can make no difference who would be my choice, if I could choose," she said, "since I have no power to be of aid to any one but you, and no power to be of aid to you, as you would see if you respected yourself or me, or even if you remembered how things stand between us. We both, if I am not mistaken, wish to remain on friendly terms; there can be no gain for either of us in your urging on me what I should in no case have found it possible to do."

"You are avoiding my question," he said.

"I am not avoiding what alone concerns me in it when I say that in no case could I have done what you would have me do." With her accustomed impulse to respond explicitly to any challenge, she added presently: "The answer seems to me clear. As things are, it seems to me that Mr. Windet is himself likely to be among the candidates; and Mr. Windet plainly stands for what I thought you stood for when I met you first and when you say I counselled you to take the lead."

"You speak as confidently," Howard said, with a deliberate simplicity that was in its effect epigrammatic, "as if you had yourself suggested now that he should take the lead."

Cecily admitted to herself that Howard had scored, though he had scored, she thought, unjustly; he scored by implying on her part a breach of confidence where no confidence existed.

"Yes," she said, "I have no doubt suggested it—I among others, if suggestion had been needed; though there can have been no need of any one's suggesting to him what you yourself have often told me was from the first his own idea. What I will not do is stand between him and the achievement of what was from the first his own idea, by representing you to him as other than I know you are. You have told me that he always meant to go to Washington, and that until his marriage he had shaped his whole life to that end. He supplied everything that gave Mr. Urrey and you your opportunity, while he stood in the background; how should I seek to make him stand back now and give the place to you?"

She spoke not without an accent of reluctance, yet with a decisiveness and self-possession more exasperating than the words she said. Howard could not trust himself to answer; indeed, the only trenchantly effective things to say were speeches in the manner of James Lidecott, and he found them a generation out of date. She would simply become even colder and more self-possessed; there might even come a gleam of blithe disdain into her eyes; she would show she knew that he had put himself still further in the wrong.

"Cissie, you are more kinds of a wonder than you will ever know," he said at last, gayly. "I am sorry for you; you have all my sympathy; to the end of your life you will be more fun than a circus, and will never see the joke. The only way to end this congressional debate—the way pointed out positively by the finger of Providence

— seems to be for me to say that I am sleepy and to bid you good-night.”

The next day Howard took his leave in a gust of railery and compliments. Cecily reflected afresh, with a returning leniency, that he would always be a boy.

Alan paid Cecily a visit some days after Howard's departure, and saw at a glance that she was troubled. In the clear white light that filled the quiet house she looked as absentmindedly aloof as the portraits on the walls; her face, like theirs, was dimmed and wan.

“Good afternoon, though you do not look as if the afternoon were good at all,” he said. “I came here determined to be jaded and rather sulky, and to be talked out of my mood, and you meet me with an aspect as grave as an ambassador's who redemands his passports; I am almost panic-stricken at the sight of you. It is plain that I shall have to do all the gayety myself; I am wholly panic-stricken at the thought of that.”

She had come forward to receive him, and smiled cheerfully enough as he spoke, not so much at his fun as at his boyishness—his boyishness, too.

“Is my face really so portentous as that?” she asked. “Papa used to tell me that I took my small affairs as if they were the gravest things in the world, and had reached their gravest crisis; he used to assure me that I might in conscience cheer up, because the worst was yet to come. I confess I could never get much consolation out of that, and can get still less out of it now. At the moment my affairs, and yours perhaps, seem to me in a

very grave crisis, so grave even that I must trouble you for five minutes to listen to me."

"There is something I can do? What fun!" said Alan, sinking into a chair.

"It is not fun at all, because I am afraid there is nothing to be done."

"All right, then; what misery!—though I am not miserable a bit at being permitted to share your counsels, and shall need all my resolution to become so. Of course, if the thing is indispensable, I can try. Is what you have to say anything very new or very bad?"

"No, it is in a sense not very new; and of its badness you must judge for yourself. Howard does not simply prefer to be returned at the next election; he is recklessly determined to be returned. He told me the night before he left. He asked me to intercede with you for him; he asked me to gain you over to his side and hold you there. That would be a measure of his recklessness even if the relations between him and myself were perfect; and the relations between him and myself are not perfect. His request amounted to an insult, and I told him so; I told him that in no circumstances would I have played the lobbyist for any one, and least of all for him whom I did not trust; I said too, what perhaps I ought not to have said, that you yourself might well be in the running, and that the place belonged of right to you. He asked me if I had suggested the notion to you, and I told him that I had in fact suggested it, though there could have been no lack of people to suggest, and urge, what you had had in mind for years."

She related this baldly, officially, by way, it seemed, of reporting to him with exactitude any word of hers that might affect even remotely the course of his affairs.

Alan needed no further inducement to be serious. He was infinitely surprised at her reporting to him such an interview; but he was struck anew by the accent of the great world in her plain-dealing and impersonality, and found himself wondering whether it was not precisely in her quality of great lady, or princess, as Nannie called her, that she was at once so effective in grave situations that called on her for action and so ineffective in a mixed society. She was incapable of putting herself forward; she could not bid for attention or for sympathy; she could not struggle to make herself a rôle; and yet she could no more help responding to her cue when by sheer stress of circumstance she found a central rôle assigned her, than she could help looking the part.

There came into his mind the phrase that she had used long since concerning their fathers' quarrel: "I do not need to know my side is right; I need only to know that it is mine." There had been in that saying a sheer indifference to himself, no doubt, but there had been also a very real sense of allegiance due her father and her father's house. There was in her no sense of allegiance due, whether his side were right or wrong, to Howard; it occurred to him that in the modern women he had known there was as a rule discernible a livelier sense of allegiance to their father's than to their husband's house.

She had singularly valid grounds, indeed, for hold-

ing herself isolated; he inferred rightly, from her colourless brief reference to the relations between herself and Howard, that she knew, what others knew, concerning Howard and Dora Crispin, and had made up her account with life accordingly upon an altered basis; and in the demand just made upon her she had found with reason a new offence. But it was plain that, in theory at least, she would have held herself as free to play her separate part if there had been no Dora Crispin, and if in the demand made on her there had been no reason for offence.

He was not disposed to judge her, though he marvelled, as often before then, at the things she understood, and the things, so plain to him, she could not understand; he was disposed rather to praise her for her openness alike toward Howard and toward him; he was disposed rather, in a burst of confidence, to make a full acknowledgment of the honour she had done him in trusting and, yes, championing him. He saw plainly enough what a man might lose or gain by marrying a woman like Cecily: in marriage with even a better man than Howard she might well have given and received nothing but pain; in marriage with a better man than Howard with whom she was at one, she might well have given and received a clear invigorating happiness.

"May I ask how Howard took all this?" he asked. "I have of course no wish to know anything you would not spontaneously tell me."

"He said that I was more fun than a circus and that I

would never see the joke, and begged to close the congressional debate and to bid me good night."

Alan could see the man saying it, in an apotheosis of levity and vulgarity; it was in moments of grave intimacy that Howard's vulgarity was sure to stand manifest.

"It is of course true that there has been no lack of people to suggest the thing to me," he said; "and it is of course true that I had chosen it for myself from the first, and planned for it; but it is true also that except for the word from you I should not have lifted a finger for myself, at least not at the present time."

"Then I am very glad I spoke the word; though I cannot imagine why a word from any one was necessary."

"No, you can't imagine; and please God, you never will imagine it or know it. I had come to be about as near *raté* as a man may and not lose his self-respect; nothing looked worth while; there was nothing that I could honestly tell myself I cared to win or to do. You have no thought of achieving any such effect, but it will be registered among your good deeds that you make people care; you make them care by obviously caring so much yourself."

She was at all times glad to hear of anything that might be registered among her good deeds; she was in the present case particularly glad. She had wondered what the explanation could be of Alan's having so long stood aside for Howard; she had guessed that there could be no explanation except that he had been overtaken by a lethargy; she had remembered Howard's assertion that it

was never worth a man's while to do anything except for the sake of something else, and she could well conceive that for a time after his marriage Alan might have found no prize he cared to gain.

"Yes," she said, "I do care much, — infinitely much."

LI

IN the solitude of Soames it seemed to Cecily that she was once more a young girl, and a young girl singularly desolate; she owned that to herself with ever greater frankness as the days went by. For all her high spirit and the air of stately self-sufficingness that she could assume upon occasion, or rather, except toward persons older than herself, could rarely lay aside, she needed all her resolution not to give way to despair. She had married for the sake of access to the larger world that lay beyond the hedges of Soames, and she had lost her access to it. She had not married out of a need to be beloved, because she had not felt that need; she had always been to some one the first person in the world, and had been strong to help or do, if not through power she herself possessed, through power she could command. She was now to no one the first person in the world, and could command no one's power but her own. There was a new and strange blankness for her in the long, unpunctuated hours in which nothing was demanded of her; there was a new and strange blankness in Soames, which Elderlin's big, kind presence had filled with movement and life and expedition: she missed him at moments as bitterly as he after her marriage had missed her. She had been thrown back into her girl's world, and she was no longer out-

wardly a girl, and had no longer anything to hope for from her girlhood coming to an end, and her girl's world was without the warmth and shelter that had once existed for her there, and she herself was without the illusions about the world beyond, and her own self, that had given her an escape for hours together from her girl's world. There was no longer, for her to dream of, a fairyland of knightly men and great ladies of whose company she should one day be made free; and if there were very hearty and human and lovable men and women, she was in no position to make friends with them or even to watch or to describe them; and if she had been in a position to watch and to describe them, she was not sure that she could profit by it; she fancied that she lacked the power. If she had not already gathered the materials for making one book, she must simply be without talent for gathering materials and for making books. She was not sure she lacked the talent, she was not sure she possessed it; she was sure only that even if her book should prove worth the writing, its success would yield her but a sober satisfaction. She had never proposed to herself a personal success, after the manner of Howard; she would have been as shy of publishing under her own name as she would have been of doing Howard's work in her own name; she had desired to be something, she had desired to count. In literature she had as yet at least no well-defined ideals to count for; she was anxious simply that the work she did should be good in its own kind: that it should be in some kind good would relieve her of the sense of sheer shortcoming and futility, would be a

testimony that she had not eaten her bread in vain. She became with some surprise aware that it was not easy or natural for her to work for her own hand; it was not even easy or natural for her deliberately to make friends for herself. She had found it easy and natural to make friends for Howard, and to work for Howard; she could always find it easy and natural to make friends for some one else and to work for some one else,—to work for some end in her own sight good, yet not her own. For herself she was not grasping, she was only wistful: she could take what came to her, she could not strive or snatch, or even press a claim.

What at the moment came to her most readily without her seeking was the kindness of the members of the Estcourt households—a kindness at once new and old. Cecil Windet and Mrs. Windet met her tenderly because she was the daughter of Charles Elderlin; Nannie talked with her with less than her accustomed irony, in part because Cecily was a person to whom, as to Nannie, Mrs. Windet's life—yes, and Isabel's—must needs seem futile. Mrs. Windet, as was natural, came but seldom to see a younger woman; Nannie crossed the door of her Pavilion to see no one; but Cecil sometimes came, and Alan came. It was from Alan of all people that for the work she had in hand she learned the most; he was infinitely observant, he was communicative, he was uninsistent. It was to Alan also she herself had most to say that she could believe of value. He was likely soon to be in Washington; she knew men and measures there as she was never likely to

know them again. There was something testamentary in the fulness of her reasoning, her explanations, her statistics ; a year hence it would be he who knew, who had the clew, and she who had not : he was going forth into a fight that she had been engaged in, and she herself was counting in that fight for the last time.

She continued to see him, gladly, during the winter. The positively good hours in her week were those in which Alan came to pay her a visit. She put the things he said, bodily, into her book. They might be right ; they might be wrong ; they were at least the sincere statement of a point of view ; they were at least the words of a man of her own time who chose his words with care, though he chose also at times, out of shyness perhaps, to deliver them with an accent of paradox and self-mockery. She sketched for herself a mental portrait of him ; she sketched a mental portrait of every one. She would have been interested in meeting him again and again, if only to make her portrait complete. She found in him all sorts of talents ; he could make men serve him ; he could find the right word, he could be convincing ; he possessed insight and a kind of workaday eloquence ; he possessed the tact of the devil, or rather of an archangel — he could face a difficult situation and not retreat before it and not tell lies ; he could conceive an intricate scheme and make it prevail with all sorts and conditions of men ; he was intelligent and serious ; he was gentle and chivalrous ; he was in intention out and away good ; and yet the last word to be said about him, she fancied, was that he was destined not to be personally

effective, he was destined not to achieve, as Howard would achieve, a personal success. The very things that claimed her loyalty in him handicapped him. It was not true that he did not "know" his world: he saw it as it was: but he refused to accept it; he insisted, and would insist to the end, as Cecil Windet had insisted, on behaving as if the actual world were one made after his own mind; and the end could only be defeat; and yet not wholly defeat. He had said to himself, or might have said, that a man makes his ideals living and effective only by living up to them, and by refusing to recognize that any one else does not live up to them; he had said to himself in effect, or might have said, that the dreamer and the idealist is a creator if he lives up to his dream, — and takes the consequences. The great pity for him, that had come to her in her first visit to Nannie, deepened as the months passed. She wanted immensely to help him; she wanted vaguely to shield him from she knew not what; she would have prayed for him, if she had not lost the habit of saying her prayers. In the end she did pray for him heartily and humbly enough — for him and for herself; she discovered, what men and women do discover, that when one cares one prays. She asked herself frankly, in long walks in the Soames park, and in long evenings alone in the Soames house, what would have been if he and she had both been free. If they had both been free, he would have asked her to be his wife. He had not said to her a word of love, or even of sentiment; but he had cared for no other woman. There were barriers enough between them in the outer world; and all

the decency and dignity in life lay in recognizing outer barriers really there, and in not chafing against them when they could not be removed ; but in the inner world there was no barrier whatever. She had never actually seen him until that stormy morning when he and Howard had rescued Dora Crispin ; but she had known of him, and of Cecil and Mrs. Windet, from her babyhood, all her life, and had known that in the natural course of things he should have been her playfellow ; and she felt in some sort as if he had been.

Alan, too, had asked himself what would have been if he and she had both remained free. It seemed to him that he had belonged to her from the beginning more than he had known. It gave him an immensely heightened sense of the wrong he had done Nannie. He ought not to have yielded to Cecil ; he had had no right to ask Nannie, even formally, in the full expectation of being refused, to marry him ; he had not been really free. His course at the moment was plain enough. He had lost his chance, the chance which does not come to a man twice ; there are few men to whom it comes at all. He had had his explanation with Nannie, poor girl ; he had done his wrong to her, unwittingly enough, long since, and she had got her pain, and he was paying the penalty and would pay it all his life. But he was not a fanatic, to refuse to live at all because he had made a blunder ; and Nannie was not a fanatic to expect him to refuse to live. Certainly no notion that he ought not to see Mrs. Lidcott would enter Nannie's head ; and it was with Nannie he was concerned, and not with an imaginary spectator.

He would see Mrs. Lidcott as often and at such times and places as every one might see her. He would see her no oftener; he would be punctilious in regard to time and place, for her sake no less than for Nannie's and his own. His visits to her, her letters, and his letters to her, were what made him alive. He had not been alive for years, as he had been in the last months; he would never be alive as he might have been, if Cecily had not checked his first advances that September morning, when he had half hoped that she would check him. He knew that Howard had practically set her free: Howard's entanglement with Dora Crispin was common club gossip. He did not know that Cecily cared for him; he only knew that they naturally came together; that they belonged together; that her face brightened when he drew near; that she had always an abundance of things to say to him; that he had been present in her thoughts since last she saw him. Her letters were full of the most cordial intimacy; they were like her talk; they took for her the place of note-books; they had been at first her note-books, sent him for his comment, and had become letters in anticipation of his comment, in answer to his comment. They had dealt at first with everything of interest to the novelist or the statesman; there was nothing without interest to the novelist or the statesman; they dealt at last with everything in heaven and earth—with the last frost upon the grass and the bare branches at Soames, with the last report from her steward, with the last chapter of her book, finished or to be finished, with the last notion that had come to her from the news-

papers or the magazines, or the "records" and "American antiquities" to which she found herself obliged to turn daily in the course of her writing, with the last notion that had come to her in hours of meditation or of handling great and little books, by great and little men, in which she sought relief and a fresh point of view when she was disheartened or jaded. The letters were not very often sent, but when they were they formed a journal; they were twenty closely written pages long; each of them a document. He, for his part, had set her the example in letters; she had but followed his lead. He had written her, or told her in conversation, everything he knew about himself and his relations to the world of men and of affairs, and no end of things besides that she had discovered between the written and spoken words. He was amazed at the number of things he found to say to her, or to write to her; he was amazed at his own frankness; he had never before willingly written a postal card, and never been frank with any one. How he found time for so much scribbling was a mystery to him; he would have taken his oath beforehand that the thing was impossible. He had arranged his affairs so that her letter, if it came, was the first incident in his day; he began to answer it at once, and continued to answer it, at intervals, till late in the night. When no letter came, he consoled himself by answering the last one over again, or by setting down what he would have put in the answer to a letter that day if a letter had come.

If the situation had been described to him in regard to one of his friends, he would have thought it full of danger. In the actual case he saw no danger. He had no

temptation whatever to enter into a vulgar intrigue. The woman herself made the thing unimaginable; his forethought for her made it unimaginable; his care for Nannie made it unimaginable; his common sense and sense of decency, and of fate, made it out of the question. He knew, or learned to know, to the full the bitterness of not sleeping under the same roof with the woman to whom he belonged, of not breaking bread with her, of not seeing her at all times and places, of not being inevitably the one human being in the world who should be appealed to first, and to whom the first news would be brought, if she were in distress. He would know all that still more bitterly the first time she was really in distress or really ill. The light-hearted philosophy with which he had provided himself in his boyhood had never been meant to bear a burden like that; he too, when he thought of the chance of her being in distress or ill, felt an impulse to take to his knees and get to prayers. His helplessness to serve her was a part of his punishment for having been a fool; the part which he found it hardest to take like a man. But when all was said, Cecily and her letters were the best that life had to offer him; they were what he had to live on; please God, they were enough; they were at least all he would get; they were more than he had dreamed of possessing before. In common with the majority of men, he had found something ridiculous in the thing called "Platonism"; he found nothing ridiculous in a man's keeping to his obligations; but he found the pain. In particular he found to his astonishment an almost boyish pain in not being able, once for all, to put his feeling for her into words.

LII

ALAN's impulse to speak of what he felt was at its strongest one still bright afternoon in March, when a five days' storm had broken and the snow lay deep in the parterres and walks at Soames. It was Cecily's day at home. He found her at her desk amid a litter of books and papers, and was on the point of greeting her as a blue-stocking and a recluse, it was so plain that she had not been expecting a visitor; but she forestalled him.

"How heroic of you to come," she said; "I was just beginning to resign myself to being snow-bound; or rather I was beginning to tell myself that I should have to resign myself or I should go mad for the sight of any one I knew. Except for the newspapers and a telephone message from godpapa, who has the grippe, I have been as much cut off from the outer world as if I were in the Arctic circle; and even if he had not the grippe, Mr. Peyton could not have ventured out in this weather; he has gout and all sorts of sedentary impediments; though he offered to come on his hands and knees, the dear, if I needed him. The papers of course," she added, with a gleam of mischief, "have been a consolation: Mrs. Outram has made another speech, claiming the franchise for women on the ground not only of the amount of property they own, but of their greater intelligence. The

women in the States are not only more intelligent than the men, she says, but they are every day increasing the distance; and she cites the work of girls in high schools and colleges. Mrs. Outram is magnificent."

Whatever her defects in a mixed company might be, Alan found Cecily, for his own part, the best companion in the world.

"Mrs. Outram is always making another speech," he said, laughing and finding a chair; "from the point of view of political economy, the property that women possess is one of the best reasons possible for refusing them the franchise. Their property, when there is much of it, has not only been got together by some one else, but it is dedicated, so long as they hold it, to unproductive consumption. It has to be managed for them; if it were in the hands of a man, the chances are that it would be used intelligently in opening up new fields of enterprise. So long as they hold it, it is in some measure a sheer loss to the wealth of the nation. As for those opera-bouffe statistics, quite apart from the fact that girls reach their maturity some years earlier than boys, I am afraid I believe that girls get their lessons as a fad and because they have nothing else that interests them; boys get their lessons as a necessary nuisance and a task; what they are really interested in are problems in baseball, football, athletics generally, chess and prosody, poker, whist, business, and amourettes. The list is not all-inclusive, but it may stand. When a girl rivals a boy in his formal lessons, she rivals him in about one-tenth of his activities, and that his most neglected tenth. Of course

I except the 'grinds'; but it is a commonplace that grinds never amount to anything, except in the rare cases when they are heaven-born men of genius. A girl goes to college primarily to get learning; a man goes to college primarily to make acquaintances and to develop his biceps: behold the formula!"

This was certainly not the conversation for a mixed company; it was the sort, however, in which Cecily found herself perfectly happy and at home.

"Really?" she said, in an accent which left Alan for a moment in doubt whether she was naïve or ironical. "But what you say about boys can hardly be true of grown men — or can it? You have suggested more than once that men seem to women less able than they are because they simply will not put forward to a woman their true reasons; possibly because they are sure beforehand that a woman could not understand them, the male intelligence being out and away superior; possibly because they are not proud of their true reasons! But I am afraid, as you would say, that the reasons men give each other in editorials, in Congress even, leave one irreverent enough. They have every inducement to write their prettiest and to speak their prettiest, and their writing and speaking remind one of a saying of Swift's — is it not? — that the actual world is an experiment to show with how little wit and wisdom a world can be run. If I were disposed to defend Mrs. Outram's sex, which I am not (Mrs. Outram has made a specialty of her sex, for which I, who love her sex, am guilty of the sin of detesting her), I might suggest that

you look to the defences of your own sex. Do you really find your fellow-men great dumb souls of unwritten and unspoken intelligence?"

"I find my fellow-woman a pretty lady with a gift for laughing at me, and a gift for illustrating my point while she laughs. Serious-mindedly, — being snow-bound should make every one serious-minded, — the importance you give to statement, to eloquence, to dialectics, is a horrid femininism. Dialectics is an art of making a man's intelligence imposing both to himself and to other people, quite apart from the possession on his part of either evidence or insight. Heaven knows I have no wish to make out a case against intelligence, least of all in women; and no impulse to celebrate the intelligence of men; there is not enough intelligence anywhere; but unmarried women and young men as a rule, I should say, adore dialectics; they take a mere dialectic play of intelligence for intelligence itself, both in other people and in themselves. Mature men — I beg your pardon for posing as mature; I do it only for the purposes of argument, and to afford you besides such an excellent opportunity for a retort, — mature men as a rule distrust and fear, and therefore hate, dialectics. They have seen too many superficially clever men the victims of their own gifts for statement; they themselves have been too often the victims of other people's gifts for statement and of their own; they cease to care to exercise their own gifts for statement or to listen to other people exercising theirs, but they do not cease to observe and to ponder, and their unpersuasive curt word when it

comes, or their practical decision, has commonly more insight and wisdom behind it than the little boy's chain of reasoning. A turn for dialectics is not intelligence, but a kind of stupidity, making it especially difficult for its possessor not to give more weight than it deserves to an opinion because he can state it effectively. I seem to find a greater degree of that kind of stupidity, that subjection to cleverness of statement, in girls than in married women, and in women generally than in men. The point is that the stupidity in question is not a mere ignorance, a mere lack of knowledge; it is a lack of firmness and fineness, or if you will, of depth, of mind, — is it not? It is a lack of the firmness and fineness of mind that lays hold on a statement or any other fact, and knows it for what it is worth and no more; it is a lack of the depth of mind that makes one ponder and distrust one's self and go slow; it is a lack of the very thing that makes one man's brain a better intellectual machine than another's can ever become, by any amount of training, or experience, or diligence, or familiarity with facts. A man is born with it or without it, as he is born with or without a certain fineness of touch or quality of muscle. If one sex commonly possesses less of it than the other, they are simply born with an inferior quality of brains, worse luck, and no amount of training, or experience, or diligence, or familiarity with facts, will enable them to deal with their world with the power and precision with which the other sex manages to deal with theirs. The modern woman's sense of superiority to the men she sees at labour is like that of a

man watching a game of chess. As soon as he is given a seat at the board, his sense of superiority deserts him. The 'moves' that looked so obviously right have a way of getting him into trouble, when once they are tried, and of impressing him with his stupidity. So long as they remained untried, so long, that is, as he remains a spectator, he sets them down as so many instances of his superior shrewdness. Modern women have the exaggerated estimate of themselves, and the special blindness to the intelligence in exercise about them, of the people who have never had things to do, and to do with commercial finish. The modern woman does not readily think a Pullman car and a railway the products of an almost bewilderingly complex intelligence dealing surely, under penalty of life and death, with more details than she perhaps has ever had in her head. She knows that the car and the railway were made by people whom she finds stupid in talk, and she takes it for granted that she herself could learn rather easily to do anything that stupid people can do. With her first day's work she would learn that it takes intelligence to do 'stupid' things, and that it takes the utmost concentration of mind not to forget stupid details; and until she had learned that her job called for every atom of intelligence that she possessed, and until she had become deadly afraid that at some spot her intelligence would be found wanting, I should not care to ride in a car, or by a train-schedule, with which she had had anything to do. The modern woman's sense of her mental power seems to me one of her illusions. Her ability to live with her father

or her husband and fail to discover, exceptional cases apart, that he has a better head than she, is a measure of her lack of firmness and fineness of intelligence, of her lack of a just appreciation of facts perfectly familiar to her. Also, I should like a cup of tea."

"Oh, you shall have a cup of tea; you shall have anything in reason after a dissertation like that," she said, crossing to a table prepared for visitors whom she had not expected; "your heroism in facing the snow is nothing to your heroism in controverting Mrs. Outram; controverting Mrs. Outram is political suicide except when it is political immortality. I am not prepared myself to insist on the superiority of women; I leave that to Mrs. Outram; I should be depressed enough to find men *much* inferior! I have often wondered whether depriving Mrs. Outram of her grievance would not deprive her of half her power and all her eloquence; though both the power and the eloquence are real enough at present, and you may find me hard to persuade that dialectical ability, or any kind of ability, is a mark of inferiority, or that men give bad reasons because they have so many good ones that it would take all day to state them. They give the best they have, the poor dears, so far as I have seen them. Dialectical ability is free play of intelligence; what you call 'sense for fact' is to be won by most mortals only through work; and, I should suppose, by work only when one works in some degree freely and on one's own responsibility. The seeming inferiority of the woman in intelligence, or rather in sense for fact, in the man's world, is due — is

it not, perhaps? — to her lack of liberty and of responsibility. She does not observe things rightly in the man's world or think things out, because she does not care; she does not care, from the knowledge at every turn that nothing will go differently because of what she thinks, and that her sole business is to manage the seemingly unreasonable male forces close at hand, — given and immutable, and for each woman different — and to take what comes. In her own world she is as shrewd and clear-sighted as could be wished; and in her world the man presents the most dense unintelligence, the most fixed, incorrigible preconceptions. Broadly speaking, no woman expects a man to understand anything about her, or about the character of his children, or about any other woman. His opinions on any of these topics are of interest only for the knowledge they afford of him. There is a simplicity, a monotony, a conventionality, in the surface that he believes in and expects, and that women therefore, no doubt very imperfectly and perfunctorily, present to him, which is not to be found in the surface they present to the merest feminine acquaintance. I have found myself sympathizing deeply with men because they did not know, and would not consent to be permitted to know, how charming the women about them really are. I often wonder what a man finds to talk about with his wife as he permits her to show herself; I often wonder how in heaven's name he finds a companion like that pay. There is a speech which papa would have received with a burst of hilarity. He was as proud of me as if I were

a learned pig, and trusted anything I had to say as little!"

At this point the water boiled, and she rounded her period, and made tea. Alan thought of the men that he had known and, in general, of the girls, and for an instant was of one mind with Cecily's papa.

"You wonder how a man finds it pay," he answered, "because you underestimate the amount of labour and weariness in the man's world. Every one has taken it for granted, quite apart from the question whether the thing is true or not, that a girl will believe anything that her mother, or the first man in her world *à elle*, tells her with an accent of authority. She is good out of habit: in particular out of the habit of being overcome with blushes at the thought or suggestion of a departure from habit. She is expected to change her habits and the occasions of her blushes with the change in the people surrounding her. She is expected to love her mother, her father, and then the man she happens to marry, for any old reason, with what in romances is called a 'great love'; — with a passionate reverence and tenderness and dedication. She is the most comfortable member of the body politic; every one feels that he can count on her. If she takes to having notions of her own, and gets her beliefs by reading, observation, and reflection, instead of receiving them from authority, no one can count on her. Her conversation may be interesting, eloquent even, but there will be the deuce to pay. The 'servant-girl' question is not to be compared with it. Mammas will have hysterics, papas will say 'damn' with

variations, husbands will dine at the club on larger and larger cold bottles and smaller and smaller hot birds. A man does not marry a woman to talk psychology and politics to her," he added, watching the tea brew; "he marries her to tell her she is a dear, and she tells him he is another, and neither of them is bored to death by the intelligence. Seriously, as you say I would say, you have lived all your life above the 'subsistence level,' and you have never heard men in smoking-rooms talk of their dogs. 'He wouldn't eat unless I gave him his meat—yes, sir, he wouldn't *eat*' ; and 'A dog will stick to you when every man and woman you know falls away from you' ; I heard those two remarks repeated a dozen times two nights ago in a club, with universal approval of all the assembled males, in the course of a narrative of the purchase, education, and lamented decease of a blooded spaniel. What I mean is, that in the present competition men who do not live above the subsistence level work ; they work till they are ready to drop, from fear of discharge and destitution, from fear of curses and open shame ; the 'boss' is worth his wages precisely because it has been found that the menace, steadily there, of curses and open shame will make a man work till he is ready to drop. When his work for the day is done and he comes home, he does not want to talk psychology and politics ; he wants caresses and devotion ; even the caresses and devotion of a spaniel ; he needs them, to hearten him for the day to come. That is not a proper speech to make to a pretty lady in a silk gown, but I am almost sure it is a true speech. I fancy Mrs.

Outram does an injustice to the 'old-fashioned' woman; I fancy too that the 'new-fangled' woman will be in essentials uncommonly like her predecessor, if only because she will have in essentials the same part to play."

Cecily did not answer this; she poured tea, and reflected how little the women she had known, except German women, had been accustomed to think of the nation as a whole, and of an allotted part in its well-being which it was assigned to them to play, and which they earned their salt and saved their dignity by playing worthily. The women she had known had felt it their prime duty to be happy; she herself when she was a girl had felt it her prime duty to be happy; it had been a plain assumption in her father's attitude and everybody else's that she ought to be happy—that she ought to be *made* happy. Her ground of discontent in her girlhood had been precisely, that on the one hand she was taught that she ought to be happy, and that the things she delighted in—art, literature, scenery, unflagging industry—were the things in which it is creditable to find happiness; and that on the other hand the very people who wished her to be happy, checked her in the enjoyment of these very things, and exacted of her a desultoriness, a dawdling inanity of existence, which made her, and which by every professed standard of conduct ought to have made her, unhappy. It occurred to her afresh that she had been a little like a child at play, that she had taken a gift as her right, because it was gladly and eagerly given, and had come to regard it as the end of her existence to receive gifts and to give nothing but pretty manners

in return. Alan, in the meanwhile, had been meditating on the strangeness to an onlooker of the blithe war of words in which they masked their desolation, and of the sides that they espoused: he who was so little longing to be heartened for his labour by the love of an old-fashioned woman, she who had retained so little of a girl's perversity and pride. They could at least play still with the gift for statement of which they, they too, had been in some sort victims; they could be gay still with the gayety of the intelligence; they were a very Beatrice and Benedick—a Beatrice and Benedick made wise too late. It occurred to him suddenly that in ridiculing Mrs. Outram he might have seemed to be ridiculing Cecily. Nothing was farther from his thought than ridiculing Cecily: he would have found it difficult to discover words for all the dear things he believed of her.

"We are just two kids in the nursery, I sitting on the nursery table and airing my notions after the manner of the dominant male, and you mothering a doll," he said. "We should have been kids together, and your nursery and pinafores would have been as familiar to me as my own, and doubtless I should have been a brute to your dollies and you would have made maddening observations in return about boys in general and my first small-clothes in particular, and we should both have cried and quarrelled and made up,—if our respective papas had not quarrelled, and cried too, very heartily, I fancy, and thought it more manly not to make up."

"I do not know whether you are a small boy just airing your notions after the manner of the dominant male;

but it is quite true, I suppose, that I am a little girl mothering a doll. I care about women ; I have been a girl. And it is quite true, too, that you sometimes show yourself a brute to my doll."

There was a moment's silence in which Cecily thought of her girlhood, and Alan thought of Cecily as she must have been when she was a girl.

"I should like to have known you, and even quarrelled and made up with you, in your nursery ; I hold a grudge against both our governors that they made the thing impossible," he added. "Even as it is, I should not have pulled through without you. I wish I could do something for you that you want done. I would gladly do anything in the world for you that you could want done."

He had a clear vision of the things she could not want done ; she could never want disloyalties. He had a clear vision, too, that it has never been held dishonouring to any woman to hear that she has earned respect and won a friend.

"There is no one, since my father died," she said, "that I would so willingly call upon, if I were in distress."

She gave him her hand, and he held it for an instant, and raised it to his lips. There were words that neither he nor she might say, and that neither understood the less plainly because they were left unsaid.

LIII

WHEN Isabel had said that she would never displease Alan again, she had been neither ashamed nor resigned; she had simply her wits about her; she did not intend to quarrel with Alan. She was bitterly angry with Nannie, who had proved herself to have more vitality, more power for defence, than could have been expected. Nannie was defeated; Isabel expected her to recognize it; she was exasperated by Nannie's showing what Isabel took for a pluck and inability to accept defeat not unlike her own. Isabel liked pluck in a fight; but she liked it only on her own side. On the side against her she felt it to be a kind of wickedness. She knew very often that particular things she did were wrong; but she perfectly justified herself upon the whole; she had done wrong because she had to; she had done wrong because it was a lack of common sense, and ridiculous, that the opposite side should possess and use all its weapons and that there should be a weapon which lay ready to her hand and which she hesitated to use. It was a lack of common sense not to use any weapon that lay ready to one's hand. She was bitterly angry with Alan because he was unjust to her. She had never wished to injure him; she had always tried to help him; he had given her nothing but disappointment, and even direct blame and humiliation, in

return. When Cecily returned, her anger with Nannie underwent a complete transformation; at least she forgot it, except from time to time. As against Cecily she felt a common cause with Nannie. She was even sorry for her. She was virtuously indignant with Cecily for not being on good terms with her husband. Cecily was not on good terms with her husband, Isabel said to herself; any one could see it. She was virtuously indignant with Cecily for not going to Washington with her husband; a wife's place was with her husband; if she had had no intention of living with him, she ought not to have married him. She had simply lost her head about Alan; it had been perfectly evident to any one, who cared to see, that she was always throwing herself in Alan's way; it was perfectly evident to any one, who cared to see, that her spending the winter at Soames had for its object to remain near Alan; the purpose of writing a book was a transparent pretence; one could write a book anywhere.

Isabel was one of the people who adopt a principle for the time being when they need it, and who alter their statement of facts to suit their convenience. There were times when her interpretation of the duties of husband and wife was lax enough. At bottom she was not the absolute gull of her own anger; but she tried to be. At bottom she knew that she was insincere, that she was preparing slanders for publication to justify herself in case of need. At bottom she judged herself as the people she respected would judge her, if they found her out, and as she feared they judged her already. Half her anger lay in her

self-judgment and her fear; she was certain in the end to be known for what she was; the time would come when the thing would show in her face; she had seen women like that, with their faces ugly with dissimulation and deception, and seen portrait painters rub their hands with glee, as Nannie had rubbed hers with glee, for the opportunity to record such a face. But she was not to be held in check by her fears. She wanted Alan's intimacy with Cecily put a stop to.

On Childermas morning she was just leaving Estcourt to carry some flowers to Nannie when she met the postman, and stopped him to receive her own mail. "I will take the letters too for Mr. and Mrs. Alan Windet; I am on my way there," she said. The letter on top of the package handed to her was directed in Cecily's handwriting to Alan Windet, Esq. Isabel had known that Alan and Cecily corresponded; it had often occurred to her that the tone of their letters might serve her turn. On her way to the Pavilion she detached Cecily's letter from the others and put it in her pocket. When she had delivered her flowers and paid her visit and returned to Estcourt, she carried a silver kettle and lamp from her tea-service into a dressing-room, and prepared to wait, with the letter she had taken in her lap, till the water boiled. As she watched the blue flame leaping against the silver, she would have preferred not to have been obliged to take the letter; but she saw no other way by which she could have possessed herself of its contents; and she intended to know its contents. When the steam came forth in a thick white volume, she held the back of

the envelope against it till she burned her pretty fingers, again and again. When the envelope opened, she extinguished the lamp methodically, and sat and read. She found nothing to her purpose, though she found much to increase her anger; in particular, details of Alan's affairs with which he had not acquainted her, and remarks about people, whom she knew, of a penetration and frankness that made her cheeks burn at the thought of what Alan and Cecily must say about herself. When the reading was finished, she recognized regretfully that she could not keep the letter; it would be inquired for and traced to her. She recognized regretfully that the means which had served her that morning could not be used again without suspicion being directed to her. She waited till the envelope was dry, inserted the letter and resealed it, and took it herself to the door of the Pavilion, saying it had been left by mistake with the Estcourt mail and had just been discovered. When it was once out of her hands, there came to her a notion that letters like that, in particular if Alan's answers could be procured, were proof of a degree of intimacy that no wife need tolerate unless she chose. A man's letters were sure to be more outspoken than a woman's. What Nannie would think fit to tolerate, Isabel felt she could not imagine, Nannie was in so many ways a fool; what was certain was that Isabel herself in Nannie's place would not tolerate such an intimacy for a moment.

A fortnight later she was closeted with the Mr. James Davis who kissed Dora Crispin as his daughter. She had kept him constantly in her service ever since she had

found it useful to learn things in general about Howard. She had continued to find it useful to learn things about Howard, and Mr. Davis had made a number of trips to Washington. She had found it useful to learn things in general about a number of other people besides Howard, and Mr. Davis had served her turn, setting down a number of items in his "expense-account" which looked to the eyes of the uninitiated like "services." To the eyes of the technically "wise" those particular items read tailors' bills and junketings. Apart from his expense-account, he had been fairly well paid, and looked upon Miss Windet's curiosity as so much invested security for the rest of his life. He did not blame her for her curiosity; sometimes it amused him, sometimes it puzzled him; on the whole he was sure that sooner or later it would prove useful to him in ways of which seemingly she did not dream; and he was not accustomed to blame anything that he expected to prove useful to him. It is a detective's business to have an eye for facts that people in general may reasonably suppose will escape observation, and to conceive them in all possible combinations to suit the interest of his employer. It is a dirty business; Davis knew as much; but he assured himself also, quite as Isabel might have done, that every business has its seamy side. He assured himself, too, that no one not an idiot could employ a detective and fail to expect him to have an eye for facts about his employer and his employer's business that his employer might reasonably suppose would escape observation, and to conceive them in all possible combinations to suit the detective's inter-

est. He had come to Estcourt once or twice to report to Isabel; he had passed Cecil Windet without recognizing him or being recognized; Mrs. Windet had seen him, and promptly asked questions about him, and named him Isabel's attendant devil. Usually she came, as she did this morning, to see him in his scrupulously neat office at "headquarters," decorated with the photographs of people who at one time or another had been "wanted."

She explained cordially what she wished him to do; she made it a point of being cordial when she asked people to do things. On the present occasion he was somewhat astonished by her demand.

"It means a fine and a stretcher in the stir—a fine and imprisonment; it's a criminal offence," he said.

"If a complaint is made; but no complaint will be made," she said curtly; "the thing is perfectly safe."

"Nothing is ever so safe as it looks beforehand, miss," said the old man, "you may lay to that. And you can never tell how ugly any one will be when he has got a cinch on you and can hit you where you live. I am not saying the thing can't be done; anything can be done if you've got the price. I am saying that it will cost money. No man can be asked to run the risk of a stretcher unless it's made interesting to him."

Further conversation, and an instalment paid in advance, assured him that she had the price, and that the thing would be made sufficiently interesting to him to cover all risks. Isabel did not like Mr. Davis; she hated to come to see him; she hated still more to have him come to see her; she hated to hear Aunt Bettie name

him her attendant devil. But the world is not made, she said to herself decisively, so that any one can avoid some things he hates; in particular if he is very much bent on gaining anything that he cares for. On that day in March, when the snow lay deep under the full sunshine, and Alan sat in Soames supplying Cecily with the particular sort of small-talk that as a blue-stockings she relished and could pay in kind, Isabel had obtained some things that she had cared for immeasurably, though they had brought her pain. She sat in her dressing-room watching the blue flame rise from the silver lamp in her tea-service and spread beneath the silver kettle. In her lap lay four envelopes, two directed in Alan's handwriting and two in Cecily's.

Isabel had got the letters in the morning. She had hurried her reading in order that a special-delivery stamp might bring them to Nannie early in the afternoon. She said to herself that Nannie had a right to know.

LIV

NANNIE had been thinking of Isabel and Alan when the fat envelope with its typewritten address was brought to her. She had been thinking that she would like to paint a portrait of Isabel when she had grown old and had all her secrets wrought out in the lines of her face; she had been thinking that she would like to paint a portrait of Alan when he had grown old and had all his secrets wrought out in the lines of his face. At the moment she was painting a portrait of Cecil, who had no secrets, the dear; he was as straight as a "right line" — *une ligne droite*; he was as definite as a constitution and by-laws; he was as formal and as kind in essentials as a book of etiquette. The four letters came out together in their envelopes; she recognized the handwriting both of Alan and of Cecily in the addresses. There could be but one reason why any one should intercept, and send her, letters sent by Mrs. Lidcott to Alan, and by Alan to Mrs. Lidcott. There must, in the judgment of some one, be things in the letters which it would pain her to know. There might be any number of things that it would pain her to know, in more ways than the sender of the letters could guess; but pain was no reason why she should lose her head. She had seen Alan's interest in Cecily, and Cecily's interest in him; she

knew that he visited her; she knew that they exchanged letters; she had taken their interest, their visits, their letters, as the sequel to the romance between them, such as it was, of which Isabel had told her; and there had been pain for her in all that; but not an overmastering pain. She could be just, she could be generous, if need be, even when she was hurt; she had at least her delight in the visible world, and her power to record it; Alan, so far as she could see, had little enough that was worth while to him or any one; and beside, she added mentally, handing herself over bodily to her Gallicism, Alan was a man; there were no end of things that a man must have to make a life, which a woman at a pinch could do without. There might well be words in the letters in her lap which would make her ask her father to take her back to France with him; she had read too many French novels, she had seen too much of the *beau monde*, not to think that possibility wholly probable; but she was a gentlewoman, when all was said, and could resist a temptation to cease to be one. There were ways in which she could not consent to receive information, even when it might deeply concern her to be possessed of it.

Alan came in toward seven rather jaded; he had been often jaded of late; he had been turning off an amount of work which would have made her forgive him almost anything, so far as sentimental forgiveness was concerned. Nannie herself knew what it means to be worn; for herself it meant irritability and hysterics; and Alan, however worn, was still in a way bright and blithe.

"I am not a responsible person these days, Nannie," he said; "I could not make a will, or know the nature of an oath in a court of law; I am small change for thirty cents, if your ladyship's ears will endure slang; I would have had a guardian appointed long since to see that I did not try to go downstairs out of the front window, or swallow a penwiper, if small change for thirty cents had not seemed a miserably small sum to appoint any one custodian of. It is one of those things that the theologian calls compensations, that a man is never fit to do his job till he works himself up into a state in which he is not fit to do anything else. I rode over to Mrs. Lidcott's this afternoon, and, by way of showing my manners, harangued her like a pirate about to make her walk the plank for mutiny. But I've got my committee whipped, bless them, and damn them (saving your presence) for the labour they have cost. I'm 'groggy,' but I've only got to stay on my feet to see them counted out. And that's a tasteful metaphor to submit to your seraphic highness."

She was minded to wait till after dinner before handing him the letters, but gentlewomen do not wait till after dinner before giving up what does not belong to them.

"I had an adventure to-day," she said; "I was tempted by the devil in person. The devil sent the temptation in that envelope on the table, which I hereby deliver to you; the envelope, I mean, not the table. On mature deliberation it seemed to me that I would rather pat myself on the back than know what the letters in the

envelope contain, and why they were sent to me. I am at present engaged in patting myself on the back. Of course, in moderation, I expect you to pat me on the back too."

Nannie could not forget her crooked back or her crooked irony even when she was in trouble. Alan took the envelope and recognized the contents. He recognized, too, what Nannie's trouble must be.

"You are more kinds of a dear, Nan, than I could tell you in a week," he said, after a moment's hesitation; "I had missed these letters and was on the point of starting an inquiry for them. I shall leave them with you to-night, and you may read them or not as you see fit; I shall want them in the morning. Considering the way in which they came into your hands, I fancy it wholly best that you should read them."

He laid them back on the table and strolled away.

"I do not want to read them," said Nannie, becoming suddenly tremulous and white; "I would much rather have you answer a question. Papa sails on the fifteenth of next month; I want to know whether you do not think it would be best for me, whether on the whole I should not wish, to go with him?"

Alan needed some time to take this in.

"There is no reason why you should not have both — the letters and the answer to your question, too," he said. "The answer is, with utter frankness, No. I am passably ambitious at the moment: I haven't had a chance to be an imbecile, but if I had, I should not have taken it. Also, to tell you a secret, I meant what I said a moment

ago, that you are more kinds of a dear than I could tell you in a week. The question that really needs an answer is quite a different one. Who could have thought it worth while to intercept those letters and send them to you?"

"Our beautiful cousin, Isabel," said Nannie.

Alan drew a tabouret close to Nannie's chair and sat down by her.

"We agreed long since that there was no place between us for lies, Nan dear, and that we could be decent even if we could not be ecstatic," he said, "though it strikes me we have been passably ecstatic in our openness and loyalty and trust. There is no use to any one in being shy of dotting one's *i's*, as you once said; I will tell you the exact truth as I know it about myself and Mrs. Lidcott. There is every reason why you should know where you stand and where I stand, and why I said you would not wish on the whole to go to France with your father."

Nannie's trembling and pallor had left her with Alan's first reply. It was succeeded at the moment by a flush of gratitude. She could be grateful to any one, and loyal to any one, who would not lie to her. She could make up her account with the truth, even if the truth were little to her liking; doubt and surmise were still less to her liking: there was definiteness and a kind of peace in the truth; there was no definiteness or peace whatever in doubt and surmise.

"There is no reason why you should tell me anything, dear, because of those letters Isabel has sent me," she said. "I needed nothing but your assurance; I wanted

nothing but to know what is best for you and for me. I am not a bad soldier really; at least I trust my chief."

"You are the most charming soldier in the world, littlest. There is no reason why I should not tell you anything; there is also no reason why I should not tell you everything. I have never said a word or written a word to Mrs. Lidcott, or heard or received a word from her, that might not have been said or written or received in your presence, and not have given you pain."

"There may be things that give pain quite apart from anything that is said or written," said Nannie; "there may be things felt and denied words, which give pain."

"I daresay. There have certainly been things that I have thought of Mrs. Lidcott, which you would prefer should never have entered my head. A man may challenge a right to be judged by what he steadily does, and not by ideas that come into his mind. In the meantime, no idea has ever come into my mind that I should wish to part with you, or that you are not one of the few utterly dear, true women in the world. If you want to know, beyond that, what I have thought of Mrs. Lidcott, I will tell you. It is not only not a time for lies; it is not a time for concealments."

"I do not want to know anything beyond that, you dear," she said, her face charged with a dozen vague emotions and a dozen quick perceptions; "I am not a fool to throw away what is my own."

LV

ALAN was still turning over Nannie's guess in regard to Isabel the next day, when he walked in upon Mistress Bridget and Urrey. Urrey was nursing Tommy Atkins, and Bridget was oiling a floor. There was not a speck of dust to be seen anywhere unless one looked for it with a magnifying glass; Urrey's brasses were shining, and the silver letter-scale on his desk had been polished till the lines indicating ounces and pounds had been obliterated.

"Good morning, Miss Bridget," Alan greeted her; "I hope Mr. Urrey has not been misbehaving himself. If you did not keep him tidy, he would be all over the shop. He owes you a pension."

"Sure, he's worryin' along much as usual," she said, after her formal "Good morning, sir," "except that he's taken to smoking cigarettes of late with his work. Whin the ash-receivers are full of cigarette ends, I know that he has been at his desk; whin the ash-receivers are empty, I know that he has been paradin' around. I'm thinkin' that he is like to be married soon," she added, with a swift glance at him, "from the way he sits nursin' that cat, and me having to put away his evening clothes twict as often as I used."

"St. Bridget, ye should say 'ayvenin' clothes,'" said Urrey; "sure, ye're the beauty of the Monast'ry and the

pride of all its outlyin' parts, but if ye live to be a thousand, ye'll never learn to spake the language, I dinna; and ye're a spy upon me inmost most sintimintal cogitations. Hello, old man; you seem to think you are some busy of late; I've been expecting you for days. There's a to-be-broiled live lobster waiting for me somewhere that I've spent the last month nursing an appetite for; let's go to lunch."

"Bridget is right, all the same," Alan replied, half seriously, half jocosely, when Bridget had left the room; "it is perfectly on the cards that we shall have you irresponsibly marrying yourself when we least expect it. You might as decently rob a bank; you have given every guarantee that you will remain a bachelor, and I for one have invested in you, 'sintimintally,' on that basis. Nursing Tommy Atkins and yearning for broiled live lobster and smoking cigarettes and wearing your dress-clothes threadbare are plain indications that my investment is 'shaky.'"

"There's manny a thrue word, sorr, spoken in jest, as St. Biddy would refuse to say because she aims to speak what folks call English; the same being a growing infant that is bursting its swaddling clothes, out of sheer superfluous vigour," said Urrey. "Bridget is a saint, by the way, in a parenthesis, though she does not know it. She is also *ex post facto* prophetic: I had intended to tell you before, only you declined to show yourself; I am a Romeo; I asked Miss Windet last night to marry me. You can hold on to your congratulations for the present; you do not look, by the way, as if you were eager to part

with them. She did not accept me out of hand ; she seemed to think the notion of my being eligible somewhat startling, — a little as if an elephant, or the man in the moon, had walked into her drawing-room and announced that he thought her the most charming woman in the world. She took me under advisement out of sheer surprise. I daresay I did not do the job well ; I daresay I did not explicitly promise to honour and obey, which is the conventional form of modern male courtship ; I may even have suggested that archaic thing, 'the masterful male' ; it is plain that I lack practice and 'actuality,' as the French say."

It was quite true that Alan was not in a hurry to part with his congratulations. He thought Urrey, so far as he knew, the best fellow in the world ; Isabel's invested securities apart, he did not think her a good match for him, even if Nannie's guess were not true that it was Isabel who had intercepted and forwarded the letters. If it was she who had intercepted and forwarded them, she would be a detestably bad wife for any one.

"You will be hard hit, old man, if she refuses," he said, watching Urrey keenly ; "though I do not think she is good enough for you."

"I shall not die of it, and I shall quit smoking cigarettes ; but I shall be hard hit," Urrey replied. "As for goodness, every woman is good enough for the man who needs her. Miss Windet is positively good ; she is good for something, — she can do things. She strikes me as the best woman I know."

There was no denying that Isabel could do things.

Alan was at the moment planning to question her about things that it seemed not impossible she had done. He left Urrey, wishing him luck, though whether he meant by that a wish that Urrey should be accepted or refused, he did not explain. He did not know; he was going to see Isabel in order, among other things, to find out. He found her in her sitting-room at Estcourt, busied with endless accounts. She adored busying herself with accounts. She made him a cup of tea over a little silver tea-service, and the tea was excellent. Alan drank his tea, and then took what he felt to be a plunge — into very cold, or very hot, water; he was not sure which.

"Isabel," he said, "the question I have come to ask you is almost an insult, I am sorry to say, but I have got to ask it. Four letters of mine and Mrs. Lidcott's have been intercepted and opened and sent to Nannie. I am about to set every means of inquiry I possess on foot to discover who intercepted them. My first step is to come to you. Do you know anything about who intercepted them; or anything that can give me a clew?"

Isabel was wholly taken by surprise to have suspicion so soon brought home to her. She was surprised, too, by Alan's deliberate vigour in his determination to hunt her secret down. She had counted on his reserve; she had been sure that he would wish at all hazards to hush up the affair. She was indignant with Nannie for proving so ineffective with the power placed in her hands. She might still beat back his suspicion, and in the end even escape detection; but if she did not escape, she would be in a weaker position for defence. She gave rein to her indignation.

"You need set on foot no means of inquiry whatever; your first step is sufficient," she said quietly; "you have had no right to pay Mrs. Lidcott, behind Nannie's back, such attentions as you have been paying her; you have had no right to send and receive such letters. Nannie has known what was going on behind her back; Nannie has eyes in the back of her head; you have made her unhappy. For her sake, and for yours, for that matter, and for every one's who cares for you, I myself intercepted the letters to verify my suspicions, or rather to have in hand proof of my certainties; I wanted your intimacy with Mrs. Lidcott broken off before it led to more than unhappiness; I wanted it broken off before it led to disaster; I sent the letters to Nannie because I thought that the shortest and simplest way, and because besides she had a right to know."

Alan thought he had become accustomed to Isabel's duplicity and unscrupulous audacity; he felt as he listened that he had done her injustice.

"Of course you do not expect me to believe a word of the reasons you give," he said. "You expect me to take them for what they are: ugly things to have you go about saying in self-defence, if I put you on your defence. You do not care a rap for Nannie; you did what you did for ends of your own. It was a strange employment for a gentleman's daughter. The envelopes were not opened in an ordinary way: I think I see you sitting holding them over the steam, and reading them afterwards with the intention of resealing them and sending them to their addresses, if you found nothing in them to your purpose.

There is not a groom in your stables who could have done the thing and not known he was a blackguard."

"A man who is doing what he ought not finds every one a blackguard, who lays hands on evidence of his misdoing and makes him put a stop to it," retorted Isabel. "I did what any woman in my place would have done, if she had cared and had had the pluck. The letters are love-letters simply, in everything but phrases of devotion. I suppose you are both too cautious to put things down in black-and-white; but I do not know that you are any the less contemptible for that; or that the letters are any the less compromising, or less injurious to Nannie."

Isabel had abandoned all notion of avoiding a quarrel with Alan; the quarrel was an accomplished fact; in the bitterness of the anger against him that she had long repressed, she was glad, at the moment, that the quarrel had come. She had known what his opinion of her would be if he ever came to know her; she had not expected him to put his opinion into words; she had not guessed how the words would hurt; she was glad to hurt him, if she could, in return. Alan was too deeply disgusted to be hurt. Isabel was simply an unscrupulous woman in a corner; it was natural that she should fill the air with abuse of him and defence of herself.

"My compliments to you on the things you think every woman would do," he said. "I happen to be sure of some exceptions. I am satisfied to leave letters which do not contain phrases of devotion to speak for themselves. In the meantime Urrey told me that he has

asked you to be his wife. I should like to know what answer you intend to give him."

"I beg your pardon, I do not follow you," she said, in genuine surprise. "I fail to see what Mr. Urrey has to do with this present business and what you have to do with my answer to him."

"I have nothing to do with your answer, if you intend to refuse him. If you intend to accept him, I shall tell him what you have done. I do not believe he would wish to marry you; I do not believe that he would feel safe with you. If he does not choose to come to you and beg to withdraw his offer, I wash my hands of the affair; but at least he has the right to have the chance to withdraw his offer; at least, as you would say, he has the right to know."

Isabel laughed, but she laughed with discomfiture. It was true that she was "in a corner." Her world, as she had fashioned it, was crumbling in her hands, or rather in Alan's hands. She hated him afresh for his stupidity, as she still felt it to be, and for his implacability. She had not yet decided to accept Urrey; but she had begun to play with the idea that he would be a second best, if Alan should break with her. She had said to herself that a marriage with Urrey would at least enable her to go on with everything in which she was interested, and that with her money to push him Urrey could be made to go far. Alan's question and menace roused every instinct of defiance in her. Only Isabel was not given to defiance when she had anything to lose by defiance and something to gain by yielding. She had pluck, but not

the indomitable pluck that is backed by care for a principle.

"Thanks," she said; "I shall not give Mr. Urry the chance to refuse me, nor you an excuse to slander me. If you have any more unpleasant things to say of me, I should prefer to hear them myself. Besides, your manners make me hope never to put myself in a position again in which a man can read me a lecture. You are behaving like a pedagogue."

Alan was still vibrating with disgust, but he too laughed, in sheer admiration of her suppleness and effrontery. Beneath his admiration, however, was an immense dread of her for the harm she could do knowingly and unknowingly.

"You are the best rhetorician in the world, Isabel; Socrates in person could not 'hold a candle' to you for making the worse appear the better reason," he replied. "There is but one thing more that I want to say to you at all. There are two more letters missing; I want them."

"There might well be two dozen more from the number you find time to write. I know nothing about them."

LVI

ON the afternoon when Alan and Isabel exchanged attack and defence in Estcourt, Minnie Fearing paced the floor in her flat on Fifty-ninth Street in New York, committing a new part to memory. She did not like committing words to memory; learning by rote was a slow and painful process for her; the more so, as most of the words did not belong to her native speech. Conceiving a character to fit the words, and divining and practising "business" and gestures, were sufficiently easy, but were a part of a monstrous "fake." If she had been paid for doing feats of physical agility and skill on the trapeze or the horizontal bars, in which she risked breaking her neck, she would have felt that there was some sense in it; she would have given the spectator his money's worth. How the spectator got his money's worth, when she stood up and talked romantic nonsense, got out of a manuscript, was a mystery to her, and made the romantic nonsense hard to learn. But the main fact was that, whether or not they got their money's worth, they paid their money. She would do anything, however irrational, that won the "coin." She observed and appropriated the turns of phrase and the gestures of all sorts and conditions of women and men, in all sorts of moods, with the same

businesslike fidelity with which at an earlier time she had observed and appropriated the turns of phrase, the dress, the bearing, the gestures of the lady, or what at the moment she took for such. She was not disposed to rest satisfied with her first success in "Mrs. Warren's Profession." She was ready to work for, to starve for, to fight for, success after success, till she could live as she wanted to live, in idleness and independence and peace, on her income. It had been a grim delight to her to discover that she possessed a talent which made her independent of the caprice of any man. She no longer asked any one or permitted any one to pay her house-rent. Her house was her own; her servants were her own, and there were no longer too many of them. Her rooms were filled with things of price, and she had learned what things belong together and what do not, as she had learned at last to dress herself and to carry herself in the grand manner. For the rest, it satisfied her down to the ground that she possessed invested securities, and lived on the margin of the Park. She had an unfailing delight in an expanse of living green, and in flowers, with which she kept her rooms filled. She had passed her childhood in a quarter in which her acquaintance with living green had been limited to the inedible ends of market vegetables, and in which the flowers she saw belonged to some one else. Besides, "swells" lived on the margin of the Park. She herself was a swell: any one was a swell whose goings and doings were recorded in the daily prints. She had a book of newspaper clippings about herself, which she read from time to

time, with much relish. She had said once defiantly to Cecily, that she was a good girl; she still felt herself to be a good girl; she had worked for what she had got, and taken chances against long odds, and come out a winner through sheer pluck and industry. She hadn't a bad habit or an atom of foolishness about her. If she was good to look at in the glass, so much the better for her, and so much the worse for any one who thought he could make a fool of her. She would smile and philosopher with him as much as he liked; she would do her trick; but in the end he would get "left."

She was still pacing the floor and learning her part, stopping from time to time to try the effect before a cheval-glass of a bit of "business" that had just occurred to her, when a visitor was ushered in, not by a "yellow footman," but by a neat maid in cap and apron. His coming had been expected; he had sent a telegram.

"Morning, dad," she said, after a glance to see that his clothes were not seedy; "what brings you so far off your beat? Sit down and make yourself at home; you needn't be ashamed because you have not been introduced. Chairs and tables, rugs and bric-à-brac," she added, with a sweeping courtesy, "I have the honour to present you to my august papa."

James Davis was capable of appreciating the splendour, if not the harmonies, of Dora's rooms. In his days of luck, aforesaid, he had visited such rooms; and he had read notices of her in the newspapers, and had been impressed.

"Gilt-edge place you got here, Dora; everything eighteen carat. Things have been comin' your way," he

said. "It's a wonder you wouldn't be so stuck on yourself that you couldn't recognize me as we passed by."

"It is gilt-edge and eighteen carat, all right; and I did it myself, and no thanks to any one," said Dora. "But you will have to cut it short; I'm busy. What do you want? What did you come East for?"

"Well, partly because your mother is dead and left some property, which as the cards lie belongs to me. I don't intend to be bluffed out of it. It's mine by rights anyway: she had her fun out of me; just standin' round and listenin' to her ease her mind was hard labour at the price. I remember still how she'd begin kind o' slow, droppin' remark after remark with a pause between; feelin' you over till she found a place she could hurt, and then goin' in for scientific punishment; a light in her eye the while to show she knew you wasn't in her class and that she enjoyed triffin' with you. If they know what's what in the place she's gone to, and have got ears, they'll keep her in solitary confinement."

"She's gone where she won't be welcome, that's no dream, no matter where it is, if she's taken her tongue with her," said Dora, shortly. "If standing round and lettin' her give you an earful makes her dough yours by rights, it is mine by rights too. But you can keep it, for all me; I got money of my own. But you did not come here to tell me that; you came because you want something; the habit runs in the family. What is it you want? I've a part to learn with a hurry-up order on it."

A hard mother makes a hard daughter; there was no kindness for the woman who had left in the girl no

memory of kindness. The man might have found memories of kindness if he had looked for them; and he did look for them and find them at odd moments of meditation or the blues. Kittie Crispin had been a buxom dimpled girl in the first year of her marriage; she had even the additional charm for him that he had made a runaway match with her. She remained buxom to the end, and her temper and her hardness were in the first instance due to misconduct of his own.

"I want to know how often you see that swell of yours, Lidcott?"

"I do not see him often at all. What has that got to do with anything?"

"You mean it's all off between you?"

"Nothing is all off; we are friends; I see him when he comes to town. Put a name on what you are driving at; my time's worth coin."

"Same here," said Davis; "I'm makin' coin for you at this minute, and for me too, or I'm out of the game. That Windet girl was in such a hurry some weeks ago to get certain letters, it gave her a pain. I wasn't next to what she wanted 'em for, and I'm not next yet, but it occurred to me that if she needed 'em in her business, I might need 'em in mine. Anyhow, there was no harm trying. Well, — the ones I've got are cussed queer letters; I've studied 'em backwards and forwards, and there are parts of 'em that I can't make head or tail to; but I'm gambling that Lidcott will lay down several stacks of blues to get a look at them. He will lay down more stacks of blues, by what I hear of him, for a woman

than for a man; and more for you than for any other woman I happen to know. That's why I am here. I want big money, and want you to get it; he's got it to give; some one has got to learn him the use of it. With my share of it and your mother's property, I expect to shift for Paris, for my health. It will be particularly bad for my health when those letters are inquired for."

There was no hesitation because of the pain that he might bring about, or even the lives that he might wreck, by submitting Cecily's and Alan's letters to Howard; he did not even say to himself that Cecily's husband had a right to know. He found no occasion to think about that aspect of the matter at all. He only saw that he had Cecily, Alan, and Howard where he could "squeeze" them for money. Upon a careful consideration he had decided on trying Howard first. He was the richest; he was the most easily accessible, through Dora; he could be most readily approached without Davis himself coming into the foreground; he would be the least impertinently and pertinaciously inquisitive about how the letters had been obtained.

Dora examined the signatures of both letters before settling down to read.

"I owe that Mrs. Lidcott one from way back," she said, with a slow smile of pleasure; "I'm an honest girl, I pay my debts. I can take the twelve ten for Washington after the theatre, and return the next day in time for the first act, and pay my debts and keep my engagements too. Women are daffy for fair to learn to write."

Two days afterwards Howard sat in the observation car in the Pennsylvania Limited, with its creature-comforts — its chef and cuisine, its barber and barbershop, its bath-steward and bath, its highly varnished and polished decorations, pulled through space at the speed of fifty miles an hour. He watched the bare trees drift past against the constant sky, and the ground close at hand spin by in long blurred lines parallel with the rails. Everything had gone ill with him these last months, at least behind the scenes. He had strained every nerve to cry checkmate, or at least check, to Alan and Urrey; and every attempt had but served to develop unexpected points in Alan's and Urrey's strength. He had seen defeat steadily drawing near him; he had felt a bitterness and a limitless hostility which he had not conceived were possible. With his present start there was nothing in sight that he might not attain. Once indefinitely "side-tracked," there was nothing for which he would have more than a fighting chance. At the moment, he was as tense as a strung bow with determination. For the first time in his life he had every one and everything in his grasp. It might take a fight, and even a fight to the finish, to make his grasp firm; but he was ready for a fight, even a fight to the finish; he was in a temper in which a fight would not be unwelcome. He had purchased the letters that Dora had to sell in a burst of badinage; he had paid a price for them that was a measure of his half-goodnatured, half-ironic gallantry. He had read them the first time in a rage of jealousy and anger; Cecily's letter was not such as she had ever writ-

ten to him, and it gave information which Alan could use against him, and which he had supposed hidden from Alan. He had read them a second time with a grim sense of the use that could be made of them: for a man who chose to push his advantages, they bound Cecily and Alan hand and foot; they were worth the money they had cost; his half-ironic gallantry had made a good bargain. There was not a court in the country in which he could obtain a divorce on the ground of those letters; but it was not a question of divorce. He knew Alan's habits, and with a little watching could waylay him—if need be actually on the grounds of Soames. No matter what the issue of their conference might be, there was not a jury in Kentucky that would not vindicate him. The thing had been done before in American politics, more times than one could count; there was but one memorable case of failure. Kentucky had its advantages. But even in Kentucky watching and lying in wait would tell against him, though not fatally; and in Ohio, where his constituency lay, would tell against him still more heavily. If the worst came to the worst, he could count on a complete moral acquittal in Ohio only by a perfectly open course and an uncontrollable burst of anger. Besides, when all was said, he did not believe that the worst could come to the worst. He believed that Alan would quail before him; and even if he did not, in the last resort he would put a stop to any public complaint for the sake of Cecily, unless he were killed instantly. Howard was expert with firearms and expert in human anatomy; he could put a bullet, if need be, where it would kill in-

stantly or where it would not. On mature consideration he decided to send from Pittsburg a telegram: "No matter what your engagements, meet me at Lidcott at nine o'clock. There are matters for you to explain. I trust you to forewarn no one of my coming." He left the message unsigned; Alan would know who would appoint Lidcott as a place of meeting. He trusted Alan just as much as he found inevitable. A message from Pittsburg would reach him too late to communicate with Cecily except by extraordinary efforts or by telephone. When he handed in the telegram, he thought of Cecily's ultimate discomfort and vexation with a certain shrinking; he thought of Alan's with an angry triumph.

He did not wait for Alan to meet him at Lidcott; he thought it better on all accounts that the meeting should take place on the Windet property. He felt no inner obstacle in explicitly acknowledging his calculations to himself; if a calculation was worth making at all, it was worth making with all conceivable explicitness. He was well past the stile in the hedge that marked the limits of his own ground on the side toward Estcourt, before Alan came in sight, striding along the path across the meadows. Howard flung himself down on a mound beneath a bare hickory and waited. Alan came up expecting to shake hands. For the rest, he looked exasperatingly cool and inquiring. The time when Howard was Alan's boy-hero and leader had long since passed; for years their original attitudes toward each other had been reversed; Alan had passed Howard, first physically and then in a number of other ways that

Howard secretly respected. He had been the dominant figure in Howard's separate world, and except when Howard had had Cecily to back him, he had not been successful in opposing Alan. He had felt suddenly, and unexpectedly, when Alan came in sight, that the odds were heavily against him. If he was to win at all, he must win in a rush.

"I do not know whether I can take your hand or not," he said; "I wish to know first where you stand; I wish to know whether you are a friend or an underhand rival and adversary."

"You will have to pick up a manner, then, and ask your questions with some form of politeness if you expect me to answer them," Alan said, still cool and frankly amused. "I do not know what you are aiming at, but you are not hitting the mark."

"This is not a time for politeness," said Howard, curtly; "I want to know whether I am to count on you to back me up at the next convention and election."

"Not the least in the world," said Alan; "I might refuse to answer you and let you take your chances, but I do not mind telling you."

"Then I should like you to explain these letters," Howard said, holding out his purchase from Dora.

The dramatic production of the letters was an evident failure, even before Alan spoke.

"So, you are the other blackguard," Alan said, taking the letters and identifying them; "I had begun to suspect it was just possible there were two. If there is any explanation to be given in regard to these letters, you

may give it; you may explain how they came into your possession, and how you happen to have read them. For the rest the letters may speak for themselves."

"The letters do speak for themselves. May I ask you what you intend to do about them?"

"I think," said Alan, smiling, "I intend to tell you to go to hell, and to bid you good morning."

Howard's face was a picture of discomfiture and anger; his device had failed; he had been overborne by the stronger man. Even his self-control was giving way under the ordeal. But he managed to utter the last sentence he had thought out when he had planned the interview.

"You will not get off so cheaply," he said; "with those letters in my possession, and you against me in politics, there is not a jury in the Middle States would touch me if I shot you, here and now."

"It *would*, perhaps, be difficult to make a jury in the Middle States understand, that after having deliberately been unfaithful to Mrs. Lidcott yourself, you could seize upon a pretext you know to be false to menace her with scandal and me with assassination, in order to force me to keep you in a place for which you are unfit. I would do more for Mrs. Lidcott than for myself; but I will not do that. She must take her chances with a slanderer as with any other member of the criminal classes; she would be the first person to wish to do so, rather than have a bargain made to shield her. Not that I think the chances great. The stratagem, by the way, is like a number of others that I have been finding in your

record. As for your shooting, I am sorry to use so much profanity; but the words seem to have been invented for just such an occasion; you may shoot and be damned."

Alan still spoke with the most exasperating assurance in the world; though he was watching Howard intently.

Howard stepped lightly backward when the last word was pronounced and drew a revolver. Alan stepped lightly forward and struck Howard heavily on the chin. The revolver flashed as the blow landed, and both men fell headlong.

A moment later, Howard raised himself, after some efforts, first to a sitting posture and then to his feet. He was deadly sick, but he had his wits about him. He flung down his revolver by Alan's side and drew the letters from Alan's grasp, and stumbled away. He took the first train for Washington. Alan lay face downward in the March grass under the March sky.

LVII

It was Isabel who found him there a few minutes after he fell. She had been strolling moodily in the fields, full of resentment against him, meditating the wording of her reply to Urry. She had heard a shot and had turned in the direction from which the report came, not with any sense of danger or even of trespass, but from a sheer instinctive love of guns. She respected people who could use modern "arms of precision" as they are intended to be used. She felt it an immense distinction to be a crack shot. She felt it a distinction of a sort to be interested in the handling of guns at all. When the outstretched body lay before her, and she recognized it, her interest in guns and her resentment vanished in a rush of fright and recollection. She saw neither the bare trees nor the March sky, and for once in her life lost all hold on her separate world and her own small purposes. She knelt by Alan in the grass and discovered his wound, and that he still lived. She lifted him bodily, and laid him in a position on the slope of the mound in which she fancied he would bleed less freely, and then turned toward Estcourt and ran like a deer. She would find at Estcourt a telephone for a physician and men to bear Alan to the Pavilion.

She met Cecil on her way to Estcourt. She explained

to him rapidly where he would find Alan, and sped on. There was no slackening of her pace, no distress in her breathing, or thumping at her heart; the level lawn as she approached the house spun beneath her, she seemed to herself at each step just to touch the ground, she saw the tips of her boots in rapid succession beyond her lifted skirts, as she saw everything at the moment, in a blur. Once at the telephone, her orders to "Central" and to the physician's office-boy rang in accents that meant haste. When the physician had been made to understand that he was wanted, and wanted as fast as a horse could carry him, she despatched four men to help Cecil, and told Mrs. Windet what she had found and what she had done. Then she mounted to her sitting-room, a prey to a misery and panic such as she had never imagined. Her world had crumbled to dust in her hands when she least expected it. She had been planning and plotting not an hour ago, full of indignant energy; she had at present nothing to plan for and nothing to plot about; she had only a panic and a pain that made it difficult to find a chair and impossible to think. She dared not wait to see Alan borne past Estcourt to the Pavilion; she dared not go to the Pavilion to receive the earliest news of his condition; he would hate the sight or the thought of her. She did not shed tears; she was one of the women to whom tears rarely come as a relief; and indeed at the moment she was panic-stricken beyond tears; she needed every atom of her health and energy to keep herself barely conscious and alive. She felt frozen, without feeling either numb or cold. She had no

sense of self-reproach for anything that she had done to confound and defeat him. There is a measure of generosity in self-reproach like that, and there was no generosity in Isabel's feeling at the time. She said to herself that she had spent her life in serving him, and that now of all people near him she alone might not go to him. She said to herself that she had spent her life in serving him, and that if he died, or even if he did not, she would have her labour for her pains. She did not say to herself that she had served him as he did not wish to be served, and had served him for purposes of her own.

Urrey came in while she sat there; she barely recognized him; she barely greeted him. He could run errands for her, and she sent him again and again for news of Alan; it needed all her strength to formulate the words. He had learned below stairs that Alan was shot; it had been told him at the door. His first thought had been for Isabel and her distress; he had asked where he could find her; he had come to her to take her orders, to help her in her need. Alan was the best friend he had on earth; the man to whom he owed most and whom he most respected and loved; but he belonged to Isabel, if only she would claim him; he was her property. He ran her errands gladly. He saw nothing in her aloofness but a delicacy toward Nannie; he saw nothing in her immobility but her sympathy and generous pain. There was contrast enough as he sat opposite her, watching her slightest movement to interpret and to serve her wants, between him in his ripe scholarship and

experience and solid intelligence and will, and her in her ruthless craft, her alertness, her beauty, helpless, hopeless, and broken.

"You are a dear woman," he said, after half a dozen trips and reports and half a dozen silences.

"No," she said, "I am not a dear woman; no woman can be dear who is unfortunate; at least no woman can be dear who is full of bitterness. I am more full of bitterness than any woman alive."

He heard, but he did not understand. She had not intended that he should.

Cecil, Mrs. Windet, Brigantine, and Peyton sat in Nannie's great disorderly studio waiting, as Isabel was waiting, for the judgment of the faculty on his chances of recovering. They had all wished in the first instance to crowd into the room where he lay, but Nannie had barred the door. She was always as white as a lily; she could not turn pale when Alan was borne in; she could only turn old and ill; but she did not forget that she was mistress of the house, and Alan's deputy.

"He is mine," she said hotly, when there was a disposition to thrust her aside; "he shall see any one whom he wants to see; he shall not see any one whom he does not. Besides," she added more reasonably, when they hesitated, "it cannot be best for him to have many people about him."

Mrs. Windet would have protested. She had some vague notion that Alan still belonged to her. But Cecil overruled her.

"No one shall do anything you do not wish, Nan dear,"

he said. "No one shall trouble you. We will wait wherever you choose."

Cecil, too, had become suddenly old, without becoming feeble. Mrs. Windet saw in the midst of her distress, saw with a certain wonder, that he was venerable; he was the chief of his clan; he administered justice scrupulously, after a fashion; his word, when all was said, was law. He led the way to the studio when Nannie named it, and the rest followed like sheep.

He, too, had found a lightness in his feet when he had started to find Alan; he had not been so vigorous for years. He had torn open Alan's clothes, and discovered his wound, and stanchd the flow of blood with bandages made from strips of Alan's garments and his own. He had bound up wounds before, and did his work skilfully.

Alan opened his eyes while Cecil's deft fingers were busy with him. He was not in great pain, but he was helplessly weak. He watched what was done for him with the impersonal gaze of a sick animal.

"Much hurt?" he found strength to ask presently.

"Pretty badly, I think," Cecil said.

Alan turned this over in his mind feebly for a time in silence.

"I shot myself by accident," he said at last, "trying to open that revolver."

"Is that true?" demanded Cecil, not pausing in his work.

"Well, it is what you are to bear witness I said. It is about as near true as most things it is right to say.

For the rest I have done nothing for you to be ashamed of, and nothing I am ashamed of myself."

Cecil had been meditating on this statement as he walked beside the men whom Isabel had sent with a cot to carry Alan to the Pavilion. He was meditating on it still as he sat in Nannie's studio. He could make nothing out of it; but he had learned to trust Alan, and learned to distrust himself. The world that he had understood was passing away; it had ceased to exist indeed almost at the moment when he had begun to understand it. He had been born in the South, and had loved it and its virtues, its hospitality, its chivalry, its honour. He had been bred in English traditions, and had loved England, its ways of thought, its manners, and its homes. The South that he had known had become a thing of the past in his early manhood. England's valour in the field had fallen seemingly from the standard of Trafalgar and Waterloo to below that of the French in 1870; her energy in her workshops had declined more strikingly than her valour in the field; she had bred for three generations from her timid population at the expense of her audacious; the rude workers amongst her timid population had become rich and their sons cut coupons; she had left in her workshops a timid population that was shiftless; had been living on her capital for two decades, and was diminishing it at the rate of eight hundred millions a year. He was willing to believe in the dignity of the new world which had grown up about him, in which a man may shoot at sight in defence of his property, and may not shoot at all in

defence of a woman's honour or of his own; but he did not see it. He understood but one thing in the new time, that a man must put money in his purse; that a man must work. Apart from that he had come to feel a lack of flexibility in himself; he had looked forward with an immense peace and an immense humility to the time when his place would be filled by Alan. So long as there were bandages to make and orders to give after he had met Isabel, he had been cool and masterful enough. He was still masterful, but he sat apart from the other three, his face haggard with distress. Mrs. Windet had never seen Cecil visibly borne down by apprehension or grief. She herself did not know at the moment how grave Alan's injury was; she looked at Cecil with a sense of kindness for him that was new to her. She had never seen him defeated or broken, she had never seen him in pain except in angry pain, she had never seen him helpless. He had forgotten that she or any one was in the room with him; his dejection fascinated her.

Peyton and Brigantine were standing near her in silence, watching her and watching Cecil. By common impulse they exchanged a glance of intelligence, and Peyton took a seat on an ottoman at Mrs. Windet's side.

"You are letting slip a chance that does not come twice in a life," he said to her, in a voice that did not carry to Cecil.

She turned to look at him with eyes that were bright with pity.

"I was thinking of something of much the same sort myself," she said.

"He cannot tell you that he needs your help; he cannot tell any one; he is too stiff-necked," Peyton added; "but he does need it; he needs every one's help. He cannot tell you that he has long felt himself vaguely in the wrong, but he has felt it; and there has not been a time these dozen years that he would not have gone far out of his way to do anything, Alan apart, that you wished, or would not have ruined himself for you, or died for you. It seems to me you have nursed your resentment long enough; too long for your happiness, or his, or ours who care for you, or Alan's. Alan's wound, you may not know, is likely to prove grave; Cecil knows it; he has been carrying the burden of that knowledge since the first moment he made an examination."

Peyton was not accustomed to lose a case that he had once undertaken; he was prepared to add more than this if necessary. He did not find it necessary to add more. Mrs. Windet looked at Cecil for a moment in silence, and then rose from her chair and went to him, and kneeled beside him. Peyton and Brigantine turned their backs and walked to a window, and grasped hands.

It was late in the afternoon before the physicians summoned were ready authoritatively to confirm Cecil's surmise that Alan's wound was likely to prove grave. When at last they had satisfied themselves and given their decision, Nannie entered in a street dress and hat and walked on her crutches to Cecil. She had forgotten that she hated to walk before any one, most of all before stran-

gers; she had forgotten everything except what hours before she had determined upon. She did not speak with the accent of a little girl; she spoke least of all with the accent that every one at Estcourt knew as her own, the accent of ambiguous irony.

"You said this morning that no one should do anything I did not wish?" she questioned. "Did you mean that? Did you mean that what I wish shall be done?"

"What you wish shall be done, my dear, if I can do it," Cecil said.

She was amazing in her frailty and dominance. There was a light in her eyes that the medical men present and that Mrs. Windet fancied hardly sane.

"I am told that Alan may live till morning," she said, "though that is not likely. I want a trap brought me with a horse that I can drive. I shall be gone an hour. In that hour I want you to say good-by to him. When I come back I want him to myself. You have said you would do what I wish; I hold you to your promise."

There was a general murmur of consternation and protest against Nannie's attempting to drive and against the conditions she imposed. Cecil instantly overruled all opposition. He had already suspected that there was more than he knew behind Alan's statement that he had shot himself by accident; he became certain from Nannie's speech and bearing. He did not need to know what lay beneath; he needed only to know that he trusted Alan, and that Alan and Nannie were at one.

"You need not hold me to my promise," he said; "you shall have anything you want, please God."

She stretched out both hands to him, and he took them, and kissed her formally on both cheeks, and stepping to a bell summoned a servant and gave the orders she dictated. When he and Brigantine had helped her into the trap, they mounted the stairs together in silence.

It was already dusk when she took the reins. She knew the way to the ferry; beyond that she knew nothing, except that she could manage a horse, and could ask questions. Alan's first pretty speech to her had been a compliment on her handling the reins. She found the ferry without difficulty; she saw the double row of lights that the river flowed between and the arcs that crossed the river like a coronet far below where the bridges lay. She put her questions and received directions in reply that were pedantically minute; the entrances to the house at Soames were known. She mounted the hill at a pace that tested the power of her horse and her command of him, and entered the park in the midst of which the great white house lay that she had seen from her windows. She did not know what she should say when she summoned Cecily. She knew only that Alan would wish to see her more than any one in the world. She knew only that a chance was given her for a few hours that would never be given her again. She knew only that he had once sacrificed himself for her, as he supposed. She did not stop to quibble about the evidence on which she knew these things; she was sure of them; she betted on them.

She did not send in her name when she reached the door; she asked that Mrs. Lidcott come out to her. It

was improbable that she should be recognized if she entered the house, but the thing was possible. Cecily came out, surprised by the summons, and surprised beyond bounds when she recognized Nannie.

"Alan is hurt," Nannie said briefly; "he wants to see you. He has not said so, but I know. I want him to see you. He has but a few hours to live; you must come at once. You must bring a veil."

She had not known what she was to say, but she had known what should be said and had found words when the moment for speech came. While she sat and waited she thanked God that she had found words. She was ready enough in her helplessness to thank God.

Cecily reappeared in a few minutes and took her place in the trap, with her veil lifted. She could not realize that Alan was dying; she could realize only that at the moment she could not have come to him except upon a summons from Nannie. There were a thousand things she wanted to ask, but she asked none of them. Nannie's manner had not encouraged questions; it had demanded obedience. Cecily had given obedience; she had submitted to command quite passively. She sat by Nannie's side quite passively while she was driven to the ferry, borne across the ferry, and driven to Estcourt. She got out of the trap when Nannie drew rein; she followed Nannie on her crutches to a side-door in the Pavilion which gave upon a stairway to Alan's sitting-room: she remained in waiting there upon a sign from Nannie. She had never been in the room before; there were grained-oak writing-tables there on which a hundred

letters that she possessed and treasured must have been written.

Nannie found both Cecil and Mrs. Windet in the room where Alan lay. She stood for a minute silent before they seemed to notice her, till Alan saw her and spoke to her. Cecil rose and lifted Mrs. Windet and held her about the waist and pressed Nannie's hand, and led Mrs. Windet out of the room to the studio. Nannie followed them and locked the door behind them. To Alan's vague surprise she swung and stumped on her crutches to the door of his office. She opened it and beckoned Cecily and admitted her, and herself passed out, and closed the door behind her. She had had the strength to do it, God be thanked; just strength enough and not one atom more, it seemed; she sank into a chair, a misshapen bundle, and burst into tears.

"It was dear of you to come," Alan said, in his wasted voice; "though I don't know how you managed it; I wanted to see you more than all the world."

"It was not dear of me, and I did not manage it at all," Cecily said, kneeling by him; "it was dear of Nannie, Heaven bless her; she brought me. It makes me almost ashamed to be here."

Alan thought of this a moment weakly.

"Yes, Heaven bless her," he said. "No one need be ashamed to accept a kindness like that, the shame would be to fail to understand it and to hold out against it. Perhaps I should not tell you even now, but I love you; I have loved you ever since I saw you; it seems foolish

to tell you, because I imagine you know; and yet it is a comfort to hear the words."

"Yes, I know," she said, "and you know. Nannie told me you shot yourself by accident; is that true?"

There are people to whom a man is justified in his own eyes in telling lies, and people to whom he must not lie.

"That is officially true; it is true for every one but you and me. Howard shot me before I could knock him down, the lucky dog. There are men who have luck like that. He had heard that I was not to back him, and he had got some of our letters. The trick has been played before in politics. Our men have been trained to 'get there,' with a Gatling gun if need be. But we cannot waste time thinking of Howard; Howard, poor devil, is a detail."

It was wholly true that Howard was a detail. Cecily had been kneeling by him and holding his free hand. She rose, and sat beside him on the bed, and put one hand about his head, and kissed him.

"We have both of us missed our life," she said. "I knew that you had missed yours when first I saw your face again, and I have longed beyond words to make the loss up to you in any way I might. There will be nothing in the world when you are gone."

"We have both of us found our life, it seems to me," he said; "and when I am gone there will be the big round world, which has never been so big or so round as at this moment. It is one of the things to be grateful for that one is born in a nation rising in power. You will see for me what I would give my eyes to see—you will see it for us both."

Cecily shook her head.

"Sitting alone at Soames, how should I read the signs," she said, "or know who helps or hinders? What have I ever known? I did not know you, even you, until it was too late."

LVIII

SHE sat beside him during the deep sleep into which from weakness he fell presently, until long after the sleep had changed to death; she would have sat forever, holding his hands in hers, telling him, without uttered speech, yet, as it seemed to her, in words that streamed from her unfalteringly, inexhaustibly, and were by him in some mystic fashion comprehended, all that she had felt and never said, all that she had never felt before and would feel now till her eyes were closed like his, — had not the thought come to her of Nannie waiting. She sank upon her knees and prayed passionately for the dead — prayed for the dead as living; she bent over him and clung to him as she had never clung to him; she knelt and prayed again. Then she went into the room where Nannie sat with Cecil.

He had asked Nannie for no explanations; she had summoned him precisely because she knew he would ask for none, though she had told him, bit by bit, in the hours in which they sat together, all she knew and much that she surmised. Her narrative was not one out of which, with his essential honesty, he could pick any comfort for himself; of the many things that had come to him of late there had been none out of which he could pick any comfort for himself. He was in no mood, even if the

circumstances had seemed to warrant it, to judge Alan summarily and harshly, as he had once judged him; and in Cecily he had from the first discerned an essential stainlessness that put harsh judgment out of the question. He was in a mood for judging summarily and harshly no one except himself.

Both rose as Cecily entered. She went straight to Nannie and took her for an instant in her arms and thanked her, and at a sign from her followed Cecil. The chill starlit world through which he drove her back toward Soames was a place of desolation out of which all beauty had departed. A sense of guilt fell on her in the presence of the great grief silent at her side. It was in some sort she that had defeated Alan; it was in some sort she that had killed him; and that not simply by her error long ago when she had forbidden him to love her, but by the part that she had played in kindling Howard's ambition when she had reproached him with his willingness to take a second place. "I broke with Urrey and Alan because you told me to," Howard had said in their last interview—in what should be for all time their last interview. It was she even who had furnished Howard with the pretext for his last attack, though Howard never would have lacked a pretext. It was in part for her sake now that Howard would not be brought to judgment—for her sake and Nannie's; no—that was for Nannie's.

They were on the ferry before Cecil spoke.

"There is something I wish very much to say to you, if you will let me and can listen," he said, turning

toward her when they were in mid-stream. "I am your father's oldest and was long his dearest friend, and I am still among the most devoted to him, and so to you. I shall be glad always if you will let me do for you anything that Charles could have done for you if he were here. You have more right to call on me than on any one else in the world; and I need a daughter, my dear; more than ever, since I have lost my son; I should have been very proud if I had had a daughter like you."

He spoke with a patriarchal testamentary gravity and authority, and with the faint accent of appeal of the man who has his life behind him.

"I was not as loving a daughter as I should like to have been," she said.

"I am an old man, my dear," he answered; "not a bad man as men go; at least I have always done what at the time seemed wise and kind: and there is no one to whom I have been as loving as I should like to have been."

They were nearing the spot where she had first met Alan and Howard. A vision came to her of Alan as she had seen him then, and of Alan as he was lying now, with Nannie kneeling and praying by him, as she herself had knelt and prayed. She was shaken by a passion of tears, and dropped her face on Cecil's shoulder, clinging to him like a little girl.